

## Chess in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age

# Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture

Edited by  
Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge

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De Gruyter

# Chess in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age

A Fundamental Thought Paradigm  
of the Premodern World

Edited by  
Daniel E. O'Sullivan

De Gruyter

To Marion and Colm

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## Introduction: “Le beau jeu notable”

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In the prologue of one of the longest medieval allegories, *Les Eschéz d’Amours*, the narrator dedicates his work to those who love “the beautiful, notable game,” that is, chess:

A tous les amoureux gentilz,  
Especialment aux soubtilz  
Qui aiment le beau jeu notable,  
Le jeu plaisant et delitable,  
Le jeu tres soubtil et tres gent  
Des eschéz, sur tout aultre gent,  
Vueil envoyer et leur presente  
Ceste escripture cy presente,  
Car il y trouveront comment  
Je fuy au jeu, n’a pas granment,  
D’une fierge en l’angle matéz  
Par les trais–tant fuy pres hastéz–  
De celle qui, au voir retraire,  
Si gracieusement scet traire  
Au jeu que je dy des eschés,  
C’onques tant n’en sot Ulixés. (vv. 1–16)

[To all noble lovers, especially to the clever ones who love *the beautiful, notable game*, the pleasant and delightful game, the very subtle and very noble game of chess, above all other people, I wish to send and to present to them this here text, for they will find how I was, not long ago, mated in the corner by the moves—I was quickly dispatched!—of a lady who, to tell the truth, knows how to play the game that I’ve mentioned, chess, so graciously that even Ulysses didn’t know so much about it.]<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I take this citation from the edition that I am currently preparing with Gregory Heyworth, and the translation is my own. Until now, the work has been known as the *Eschés amoureux*, but we feel that title to be problematic. See Gregory Heyworth, “Textual Identity and the Problem of Convention. Recovering the Title of Dresden Oc. 66,” *Textual Cultures: Text, Context, Interpretation* 1.2 (2006): 143–51.

This work was composed in the fourteenth century, though the trope of chess for love goes back at least as far as the troubadours of the twelfth, suggesting just how quickly the ideas of lovemaking and chess were linked. Yet, in the light of how much has been written on chess in the Middle Ages, including the essays contained in this volume, the expression invites renewed consideration.<sup>2</sup> The game of chess is notable not only because it is noteworthy, i.e., important, in medieval culture, but also because it is a system capable of generating infinite permutations that may be noted down and examined. Its rules and potential for metaphorical or allegorical representation invite poets and preachers to note the similarities between the world on and the world off the chessboard. As such, the game as an abstract whole or a discreet sequence of moves may de-note and con-note different things: order, symmetry, aggression, sacrifice, surrender, good vs. evil, or myriad other meanings. Chess's mutability takes on a whole new dimension in medieval culture when we consider notions of time and space: the game we play today did not exist as such throughout most of the Middle Ages; rather, it changed over history and across nations and even local regions. Finally, add other social or historical considerations in regard to the players themselves—age, gender, and class—and the hermeneutic implications become even more fecund. Consider the meaningful differences among games played between a man and the woman he loves, between a treasurer against a sheriff, or between a lady the devil himself: these are all situations that arise in the chess games of the present volume, thus underscoring the game's importance to understanding medieval culture.

It may be impossible to overestimate the importance of chess in medieval culture. Collections of medieval chess problems (and the modern chess problem survives today in many newspapers next to the crossword puzzle and word jumble), an inheritance from the Muslims, occupy dozens of manuscripts must have engaged minds for countless hours. Chess can set the scene in courtly literature, for example, between lover and beloved, adversaries in their own right. In didactic texts, chess became a figure of thought and speech in treatises on the proper functioning society and social mores. The game's geometric patterns and alternating colors made it a favorite target for manuscript illuminators and other artists who incorporated chess imagery into their work. During the Middle Ages, artisans crafted fine chess sets made of stone, precious metals, and jewels. Chess was so ubiquitous that accounting for its significance in any satisfactory way would arguably require several volumes

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<sup>2</sup> Merritt R. Blakeslee, "Lo dous joxs sotils: La partie d'échecs amoureuse dans la poésie des troubadours" *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 18 (1985): 213–22; here 216.



filled with the research of dozens of scholars from an array of academic fields: history, literature, archeology, and historical anthropology, among others.

How can we begin to understand the appeal of the game to a medieval audience? The game's martial origins were of obvious import to people who lived daily among warring factions, be they armies of foreign kings or the knights of neighboring barons enmeshed in some local, territorial skirmish. The game quickly became a requisite part of a knight's education, for in it, a knight could learn how to execute cunning feats of military strategy. Finally, the game taught proper chain of command in military matters: kings stood in the back center in the game's initial positioning where he could survey the whole battlefield, whereas pawns or foot soldiers stood at the front lines, ready to protect their lordly masters and be sacrificed in the march to victory.

Of course, kings did not only conduct wars (though some did admittedly show a penchant for warfare); they also ruled over their subjects, for better or for worse, by executing laws and delegating authority to an entire cast of officials—sheriffs, bailiffs, seneschals—and relying on the lower classes to provide him with duty as well as goods to everyone in the land. It was therefore a short leap to imagine the king of the chessboard and those surrounding him as a representation of medieval society. These political allegories could be more or less detailed depending upon a writer's heuristic goals.

One wonders, though, if beyond the notions of war and civic hierarchy, what else might help account for the game's wild popularity between 1100 and 1500? Could the rise of scholastic thought have contributed to the game's rise? The Schoolmen searched for knowledge using dialectic, the two-sided debate in order to reconcile Church teaching and products of pagan teachings. While a chess game does not end in a resolution of the two sides *per se*, the notion of two oppositional forces locked into a battle with well-established rules that call for implementing logical strategies might very well have struck the imagination of more than one Scholastic thinker. Moreover, scholastic emphasis on essence and existence, a bedrock distinction in Aristotelian thought, might very well have provided some impetus behind the proliferation of chess allegories throughout the Middle Ages. More than one author in the present volume suggests that the two might very well have coincided in the medieval mind.

We may also appeal to medieval aesthetics to understand how chess might also have garnered wide appeal in the Middle Ages. In today's (post)modern world, we search for what's new, original, and exciting. In medieval art and literature, the spectator or reader sought the recognizable and the familiar. This is not to say that he sought for rote repetition; rather, the medieval reader delighted in the ebb and flow of play and variation. For example, the songs the troubadours, whose playfulness immediately makes its comparison to other ludic pursuits quite natural, was based on system of conventions to which

composers adhered while making a number of slight variations in form and content to produce a new song: songs were (generally) strophic in metrical and melodic form, deployed complex rhyme schemes and other acoustic effects, and called upon *loci commune* to express feelings of love, sadness, frustration, etc. There were vogues, of course, and trends, and it is relatively easy to look back on troubadour poetry and see where they began and ended. However, any given troubadour song was subject to an infinite number of combinations and possibilities...just like chess. Every game started out with an equal number of pieces prearranged into their starting positions, the rules were known (or agreed upon) ahead of time, and play proceeded according to those rules or the game was considered invalid. As in the troubadour poetic system, no two games of chess were executed in exactly the same way. Moreover, where poetry reveals trends and evolving tastes as time passes, the game of chess also evolved over time and across space to create the local rule variations—or *assizes*—according to the predilections of particular players at a particular time in a particular place.<sup>3</sup>

Two texts, one medieval and one modern, pervade any serious discussion of medieval chess and culture. The medieval text is Jacobus de Cessolis's *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium super ludo scacchorum*, a medieval blockbuster of a text, that compared chess pieces, their arrangement, and moves to the ideal medieval *polis*. In whole or in part, the work survives in scores of manuscripts. Relatively soon after its appearance around 1300, the work was translated into several languages—German, French (on two separate occasions), Italian, Spanish, Catalan, Dutch, Swedish, and Czech—and represented perhaps the apex of chess's hold on the medieval imagination. William Caxton's English version, *The Booke and Playe of Chess* (1474) was in fact one of the first books to be printed in English. Comparisons between society and chess had been made before Jacobus, but the lion's share of the work's popularity was most likely due to the detail into which Jacobus extended his political metaphor. It was easy to see correspondences between the king and queen on the board and those who resided in the huge castle on the hill. However, Jacobus, not content with facile comparisons, delved into less obvious similarities, especially in regard to the pawns. As Richard Eales explains it:

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<sup>3</sup> David Hooper and Kenneth Whyld define "assize" as follows: "a medieval term for a particular set of rules of chess, which differed from country to country and often within the same country. Even the array was not standardized. There was the long assize, with men arranged as they are today, and various kinds of short assize, with pawns on the third rank and an unorthodox arrangement of the pieces. The short assize was so named because it curtailed the otherwise lengthy opening phase, the forces making contact sooner," *The Oxford Companion to Chess* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 17. Murray discusses the evidence of various short assizes in *A History of Chess* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 476–82.

De Cessolis drove home his point by giving a much more elaborate account of the third estate than earlier writers. Though he recognized that pawns in chess all have the same move, and have much in common, he characterized each of them separately to represent a different trade or profession, from labourers, smiths and masons to notaries, advocates and inn-keepers. Though the descriptive scheme was confined to secular society, 'bishops' being portrayed as judges and 'rooks' as royal messengers, it was still an extremely thorough one.<sup>4</sup>

The inclusion of all estates likely widened the allegory's—and the game's—appeal outside of the aristocratic and Latinate circles. In any case, as the essays in this volume attest, the *Liber*, even when it is not the primary object of study, enters most discussions of medieval chess culture.

In addition to Cessolis's medieval text, the modern text that resurfaces time and time again is H. J. R. Murray's *A History of Chess*.<sup>5</sup> Chess histories and commentaries are myriad, but no single volume has stood the test of time better than Murray's *magnum opus*. As Marilyn Yalom writes in the very first endnote of *Birth of the Chess Queen: A History*,

Murray's 900-page book constitutes the Bible of chess historians. With his knowledge of numerous languages including Latin and Arabic, and his devotion to chess worldwide, H. J. R. Murray was one of those late Victorian giants whose intimidating figure seems to have inhibited further research for the next two generations.<sup>6</sup>

Murray traces the development of the game from its early Persian ancestor, *chaturanga*, right up to the very time of when he was writing at the turn of the twentieth century. The work is replete with literary excerpts in classical, medieval, and modern languages, diagrams, and copious commentary on the game through twelve centuries. So compendious is the work that it may never be supplanted as the standard history of the game, even if many would like to see it superseded, for doing so would require at least a lifetime of scholarly effort, if not a team of scholars to work one or two decades in close collaboration. This is all the more astounding when one realizes that Murray also contributed articles on specific issues of chess history as well as a later digest of chess history, *A Shorter History of Chess* (published posthumously).<sup>7</sup>

In the twentieth century, chess histories have appeared and updated Murray's work, but none have come close to Murray's comprehensiveness. Most important has been Richard Eales, *Chess: The History of a Game*. His 240-page account attempts to cover the same wide chronological parameters as Murray,

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Eales, *Chess: The History of a Game* (New York and Oxford, UK: Facts on File Publications, 1985), 66–67.

<sup>5</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess* (see note 3).

<sup>6</sup> Marilyn Yalom, *Birth of the Chess Queen: A History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 243 n 1.

<sup>7</sup> Most of Murray's bibliography can be found in E. Meissenburg, "H. J. R. Murray (1868–1955): bibliography of a chess historian," *British Chess Magazine* 100 (1980): 249–52.

but the real value of his volume is its bibliographical update of Murray. In other words, while Eales has noted the works of other scholars on particular medieval texts and issues, he does not correct Murray as much as add to him. He notes the proliferation of work on particularly important medieval works such as the "Einsiedeln Verses," Jacobus de Cessolis's *Liber de moribus*, Alfonso el Sabio's *Libro del acedrex*, among others. In addition to Eales, one notes other worthy volumes to have appeared in the last decades: Henry A. Davidson, *A Short History of Chess*; Sally Wilkins, *Sports and Games of Medieval Cultures*; David H. Li, *The Genealogy of Chess*; Adolivie Capece, *Le grand livre de l'histoire des échecs*; Wolfram Runkel, *Schach: Geschichte und Geschichten*; and David Hooper and Kenneth Whyld, *The Oxford Companion to Chess*.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, someone has yet to offer us a single work that adequately combines the fundamental ground covered by Murray with the last century's advances and discoveries in the history of chess.

Exhaustivity in treating chess in medieval culture would require more space than allotted in the present volume, and focussing on one text or one national tradition, while creating depth of knowledge, would obviously restrict the work's audience. The resulting editorial strategy aims to chart the waters between depth and breadth. The essays are gathered here with the intent to represent some of the wide chronological, geographical, cultural, and institutional parameters within which chess operated upon the medieval imagination. The essays cover several linguistic and cultural categories and the commentators here deal with texts composed in Catalan, English, French, German, Latin, Swedish, Pahlavi (a Persian language), and Spanish. These texts date from the seventh through the sixteenth centuries and account for, to the extent possible, changes in social mores and how these movements might have been reflected on the chessboard. The intellectual disciplines implicated in these studies include art, literature, economics, politics, philosophy, education, and related fields.

As an aid to comprehension, the essays are grouped into three categories: Chess, Morality and Politics; Women On and Off the Chessboard; and Playing Games with Chess and Allegory. The essays, much like a game of chess in progress, might have been arranged in other sequences and juxtaposed differently. However, within each category, the essays address literary, artistic, and historical texts from different places at various times over the thousand or so years we call the Middle Ages and early modern period. Moreover, the essays ask different questions of these texts and achieve, the editor hopes, an effect akin to shining light through a diamond where the gazer gains a glimpse

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<sup>8</sup> See "Selected Bibliography" at the end of this volume for bibliographical data on these works as well as for other works dedicated to chess history that have been published over the last century or so.

of something beautiful in its myriad facets, the result of time, effort, and precision craftsmanship.

## Chess, Morality, and Politics

As noted above, chess was, first and foremost, a war game, but warring in the Middle Ages, as it is today, came down ultimately to politics. No wonder chess became so quickly a metaphor for social and political conditions after it was introduced to Western Europe around 1100. The game proved to be a valuable means of assessing the social landscape all over Europe, and where that landscape differed, the game could adapt or, at least, those who thought about chess could adapt the beautiful game to their own ends. In order to illustrate this point adequately, the first section of essays consider questions of chess, morality, and politics in four medieval cultures: Germanic, English, Swedish, and French. Furthermore, they interrogate texts pertaining to courtly literature, theological questions of temptation and sin, administrative policy, and principles of good government.

Chess abounds as a metaphor in Middle High German culture, in works as famous as Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* and Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* to important but lesser known works such as the compendious *Liet von Troye* (ca. 1200) by Herbort von Fritzlar, the *Murtner Siegeslied*, and Rüdiger von Hünchouer's *Wittich vom Jordan* (1290–1293). In his contribution, "Chess in Medieval German Literature: A Mirror of Social-Historical and Cultural, Religious, Ethical, and Moral Conditions," Albrecht Classen carefully analyzes a selection of relevant passages in Middle High German texts from epic and courtly narrative to didactic literature that past scholarship has failed to appreciate sufficiently. In these numerous contexts, we encounter protagonists who either observe or participate in a game of chess or, more curiously, utilize a chessboard or the pieces for other purposes. As Classen himself observes,

The variety of allegorical applications of chess for the representation of courtly society at large, but then also of courtly love, cultural transgression, military strategies, meditation and wisdom, and so forth, was almost infinite, which signals that the chessboard and its pieces powerfully served these poets and writers as some of the most fascinating and far-reaching literary images to reflect upon fundamental ideals, values, principles, and concepts determining courtly society and its relationship both to the lower classes and also to God. (44)

Such observations couched within the meaningful web of references that Classen weaves make his essay an excellent starting point for the volume.

Olle Ferm transports the reader just north of Germany to Scandinavia, to Sweden, in his essay, "Making Chess Politically and Socially Relevant in Times

of Trouble in the *Schacktavelslek*." The *Schacktavelslek*, a loose translation of Jacobus's *Liber* written probably in the 1460s, makes a series of significant adaptations to its source text so as to address events in contemporary Sweden more directly. The work should be read, argues Ferm, in its historical context because, far from proposing an ideal state in only abstract terms, the *Schacktavelslek* was composed at a time when the Swedish kingdom faced formidable threats from both within and outside of its realm, particularly the desire for political dominion among the Danish regents of the Nordic Union. Social disorder, if not outright dissolution, loomed on the horizon, so suggests the author of this chess allegory. In setting forth his explanation of rules of chess as they applied to politics, he provides tangible historical examples of moral decay to warn of the consequences of following the path the nation was on. Calling upon the philosophical idea of the common good born in Greek philosophy and subsequently shaped by Thomas Aquinas and Giles de Rome, whose *De regimine principum* was paraphrased in Swedish in the early fourteenth century, Ferm reads the Swedish chess allegory as one that emphasizes moral virtue and education all while making the case for national kingship and a constitutional monarchy.

With Paul Milliman's essay, "*Ludus Scaccarii*: Games and Governance in Twelfth-Century England," we wade into the deep waters of finance. Milliman considers Richard Fitz Neal's *Dialogus de Scaccario* or "Dialogue of the Exchequer," a unique historical document that outlines how the financial administration of England operated. Henry II's treasurer, Richard begins his work by comparing this important and serious aspect of royal administration to a game of chess. After 1884 when Hubert Hall elaborated upon this comparison of what he called "the game of the exchequer,"<sup>9</sup> historians have taken this comparison merely as a literary conceit and followed the analytical construct established by R. L. Poole, who described the Exchequer as a machine.<sup>10</sup> Milliman contends, *pace* Poole and those of his ilk, that perhaps Richard wished indeed that his readers think about the Exchequer not as a machine, but as a game. A reexamination of the Exchequer as a game provides additional insights into the process of royal administration by illustrating how people conceptualized (or at least were supposed to conceptualize) the Exchequer. Milliman believes the playfulness and even mystery of the game of chess was part and parcel of Richard's view of the Exchequer:

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<sup>9</sup> Hubert Hall, *Introduction to the Pipe Rolls* (London: Wyman, 1884).

<sup>10</sup> Poole explains: "I have considered the Exchequer a machine at work and have tried to explain how it worked." Reginald L. Poole, *The Exchequer in the Twelfth Century* (1912; London: Frank Cass, 1973), vi.

Richard's text is a rulebook to teach his readers how to play the game, not how to win it. To give away all the mysteries of the Exchequer would undermine Richard's position, both in relation to the sheriffs and in relation to the king. (87)

In the present-day world where financial markets show so much volatility so as to defy systematic explanation, how can we not see in Milliman's thesis a provocative interpretation of finance as subject to the whims and competence (or failings!) of the players involved?

In the final essay of the first section, Kristin Juel turns towards questions of conscience in "Defeating the Devil at Chess: A Struggle between Virtue and Vice in *Le Jeu des Esches de la dame moralisé*." The text, an overtly religious allegory that survives in a single manuscript of the late 15th century, tells of a lady who plays chess against the devil. The prince of darkness tempts her with lofty notions of love in an effort to force her to make a mistake in playing. Juel undertakes her reading only after contextualizing it in the traditions of what she calls "static chess moralities"—chief among them the *Quaedam moralitas de scaccario* attributed to John of Wales and, of course, Jacobus's allegory—and "active chess moralities." She considers the influence of *Floire et Blancheflor*, the *Miracles de Nostre Dame* by Gautier de Coinci, and the *Echés amoureux* (*Eschéz d'Amours*). The last work seems to have exercised a particularly strong influence on the composer of the *Jeu*, but there is more than one's reputation or pride on the line in the *Jeu*. As the game is played against the devil himself, it is lady's very soul at stake in each and every move of the game. Juel observes:

In the *Jeu*, it is not only the ultimate outcome of the game that symbolizes a surrender to sin in general; every move made by the devil represents a particular temptation or sin while the lady's response to every move symbolizes her resistance to it. Just as in the *Echecs*, the moves made by the devil pose a particular threat to the lady. The chess moves, no longer in the abstract, take on symbolic value. The specific moral meaning—in this case, the particular threat of the devil or an act of resistance on the part of the lady—is derived from the specific threat of one chess piece to another. (107–08)

Far from comprising a sermon of only fire and brimstone, however, the *Jeu*, argues Juel, offers an ultimately optimistic vision: here good chess play equals virtuous behavior and when the lady defeats the devil at chess, hope is given to all readers.

## Women On and Off the Chessboard

Chess has long been considered a man's game. After all, the game started as a representation of war, the pieces represented soldiers, and the game became an important component of a knight's, and not necessarily a lady's, education.

Moreover, only one piece is a woman, the queen, and even she was absent in early chess when in the square next to the king was the *farzin* or royal adviser. Even after the queen replaced the adviser, it took a long time for this piece to evolve the powers that she enjoys in the modern game. Nevertheless, women abound in chess literature. Other times, women are active players of chess or a woman's love becomes the stake involved in a game of chess. Thus, while chess might seem at first blush to be a purely masculine pursuit, one does not have to go far to see women assume a significant role in the world of chess.

In "Medieval Chess, Perceval's Education, and a Dialectic of Misogyny," Jenny Adams adopts a perspective on the role of chess in medieval education by first making her readers aware of the current pedagogical role of chess. While more women and girls may play chess today than in the Middle Ages, few of them figure among the top players in scholastic, national, or international arenas. Adams links this disparity directly to the character traits that medieval chess writers promoted, traits that became coded as specifically masculine. By way of illustration, she considers one of the great medieval stories of youth and education, Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du graal* or *Perceval*, and the later version of the tale that goes by the title of the *Didot Perceval*. Adams perceives a fundamental shift in the educational paradigms at work in each text. Chrétien's twelfth-century narrative would seem to favor a Bernardian model where stress is placed on individual teachers and authority figures that teach with an eye to *humanitas* and *amicitia*. However, by the early thirteenth century when the *Didot Perceval* was composed, the Scholastic model and its emphasis on learning through experience, not a teacher's tutelage, had become the predominant pedagogical theory. Chess, which figured very little in Chrétien's tale, occupies a central place in Didot and, in light of Scholastic learning practices, Adams does not think that to be a coincidence:

Rather than learn through teachers, the hero learns through his adventures, and one of the most important of these occurs over a chessboard. Perceval's experience at the chessboard castle thus merits deeper consideration, as it both mirrors his earlier experience at Arthur's court and proves to be the fulcrum for the knight's ascension to the throne at the end of the story. (129)

That experience involves Perceval losing three chess games in succession at the chessboard castle and a return to that castle later on to mark, as Adam reads the text, a repudiation of the feminine.

Sonja Musser Golladay moves the discussion further to the west in her essay, "Images of Medieval Spanish Chess and Captive Damsels in Distress." She also displaces the object of study from linguistic to artistic representations of women and chess. She considers chess paintings in Alfonso X el Sabio's *Libros de acedrex dados e tablas* or *Libro de juegos* [*Books of Chess Dice and Tables* or *Book of Games*], completed in Seville in 1283 and then a later painting inside the domes



of the lateral cupolas of the *Sala de los reyes* (or *Sala de justicia*) of the Alhambra Palace in Granada. Musser Golladay reveals hidden allegorical significations behind Alhambra's Gothic art when she considers a chess-rescue painting against the aesthetic background provided by images of chivalric capture on the betrothal caskets as well as the historical background of Spain's Reconquest. The key to understanding, according to Musser Golladay, comes as a result of piecing together this evidence rather than focussing on one master text or event:

Simply because the scenes derive from longer, known or unknown stories does not require that any one recognizable episode of a tale represent the moral of that tale as a whole. José Gudiol Ricart is correct when he laments, "no text could possibly explain such an iconography." We must instead consider why the same non-narrative groupings of selected scenes appear together in the Alhambra and in other places in order to decipher their collective message. (168)

Through her meticulous gathering of evidence, detective work, and careful reasoning, Musser Golladay makes a persuasive argument in deciphering images that still confound many art historians.

Mark Taylor focusses our attention on the chess queen herself, and entitles his essay provocatively: "How Did the Queen Go Mad?" His question is technical, but very important, for understanding the modern game: how did the *fers* (adviser and antecedent to the chess queen) with its limited medieval movement evolve to take on her modern queen's movement? For this revolutionized the way chess is played, sharply distinguishing modern from medieval chess. Not even Murray undertakes the question. Taylor provides two kinds of evidence: first, he lays before the reader a small group of medieval texts prior to about 1475 that suggest or imagine a *fers* more powerful than her limited oblique movement warrants, and that also perhaps imagine a more powerful *alfin* (chess bishop). Second, by comparing the old and modern movements, he deduces the most likely sequence of change, assuming development from simpler to more complex, from small to greater steps. Enough preliminary evidence exists, contends Taylor, that the change may have occurred in stages, which casts doubt upon our prevailing understanding about the queen. With this insight, he calls for a concerted effort to update Murray and, in so doing, return to the medieval texts in order to read them afresh.

## Playing Games with Chess and Allegory

Just as the game of chess evolved over time, chess allegories have changed to suit both the tastes of a particular audience and the heuristic aims of a given

author. Moreover, while both the game and allegory follow proscribed rules in order to be understood, those rules are more malleable than they might appear at first glance. For example, moving a rook diagonally would be considered an infringement of the rules, unless, of course, the rule was broken to make a point in an allegorical universe. Readers may think chess to be capable already of enough combinations to articulate any given message, but some authors like to explore its limits and how it can be made even more meaningful outside of its ludic context.

Amandine Mussou considers the practical implications of a game that is simultaneously compact in size and scope but infinite in its potential permutations. In her essay, "Playing with Memory: The Chessboard as a Mnemonic Tool in Medieval Didactic Literature," she reads three chess allegories against the backdrop provided by recent scholarship on medieval memory systems. The individual texts she chooses tie her contribution back to those of Juel and Adams while anticipating those by O'Sullivan and del Puppo: the *Liber de moribus hominum* by Cessolis; *Les Eschés amoureux* (*Les Eschéz d'Amours*) as well as *Le Livre des eschez amoureux moralisés* (both of which she contends were written by Evrart de Conty), and, finally, Philippe de Mézières's *Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, the third book of which is almost entirely based on a *moral eschequier*. Whereas many have commented on how chess forms a part of a knight's education, Mussou believes that chess functioned specifically as an educational tool and mnemonic device.

In "Changing the Rules in and of Medieval Chess Allegories," Daniel O'Sullivan explores how the rules of chess allegory changed as the game evolved. Many scholars, including several in this volume, have noticed that there is a general movement from static to active (to use Juel's terms) chess allegories. O'Sullivan attributes this to the rising popularity of the game and the wider recognition of how the game was played among audiences. When a poet could count on his audience understanding how the game was played, he could employ far more detailed rhetorical strategies to accomplish his heuristic aim. This was accomplished gradually, of course, over several centuries. Beginning with one of the earliest chess texts, the "Vijāriṣṇ I Chatrang" or "The explanation of Chatrang" written in late seventh-century Persia and comparing it to Jacobus's *Liber*, O'Sullivan suggests that early chess allegories had to remain static and make all allegorical correspondences explicitly because the poets could not count on their readers understanding the significance of the various moves. Some chess allegorists such as the poet of *Les Eschéz d'Amours* (*Eschés amoureux*) did include a game in the text, but it could not be accomplished with any textual economy: the poet still had to explain the moves and rely on outside symbolism to convey his message. Only with the advent of the new rules could true chess allegory come into being as the fifteenth-century Catalan text, the *Scachs d'amor*, demonstrates. In this text,

game and allegory are seamlessly fused together for perhaps the first time in chess literature.

With the volume's final contribution, we come circle in many ways, for Dario del Puppo refocusses attention on that great medieval chess allegory in his article, "The Limits of Allegory in Jacobus de Cessolis's *De ludo scaccorum*." Del Puppo contextualizes the *Liber* in its historical context of early fourteenth-century Italy, its rhetorical context as a book of *sententiae* and *exempla*, and its theological context:

As a Dominican friar, he [Jacobus] would have been well versed in discussions about free will. And he is aware of the important political and historical changes taking place in Genoa in his lifetime. But his is still essentially a teleological universe, like for Dante and other late medieval writers and thinkers. For all of "the countless number of ways to play, because of the various meanings and metaphors" that makes chess intriguing, the chessboard is nonetheless a circumscribed space with prescribed roles. The apparently infinite number of moves on the chessboard is all contained within a universe at whose head sits a divine being. (233)

Del Puppo incurs a two-fold debt on the part of his readers in his essay: first, he reminds us that while chess offers seemingly infinite possibilities of play and meaning, the game is nonetheless inscribed within its own rules. Even chess and allegory have their limits. Second, he grounds his discussion of textual transmission and interpretation of allegory in solid philological work on an early witness of the *Liber*, Ms Ricketts 194 in the collection of the Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

## Conclusion

Sixty-four squares. Thirty-two pieces. Two armies, each led by one king. Chess comes down to those simple parameters, and yet in medieval culture it was—and remains today—capable of expressing so much of the human mind. In any game, a chess piece may move no further than seven squares away from the square it occupies, and that goes only for a minority of the pieces; however, as a metaphor for war and politics, as well as allegories of love, education, reason, finance, philosophy, and theology, chess allows the human mind to soar far beyond.



## Part I: Chess, Morality, and Politics



## Chapter 1

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### Chess in Medieval German Literature: A Mirror of Social-Historical and Cultural, Religious, Ethical, and Moral Conditions<sup>1</sup>

Chess has intrigued people all over the world, and the game can actually look back to a very long history, wherever its origin actually might have been, whether in India, Persia, or Arabia.<sup>2</sup> In fact, chess is much more than just a game played by two people using a board to move pieces around fighting against each other until one side is defeated (checkmate). H. J. R. Murray formulated in his by now classic study *A History of Chess*:

We must accordingly conclude that our European chess is a direct descendant of an Indian game played in the 7th century with substantially the same arrangement and method as in Europe five centuries later, the game having been adopted first by the Persians, then handed on by the Persians to the Muslim world, and finally borrowed from Islam by Christian Europe.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Christoph J. Steppich, Texas A&M University, for his critical reading and helpful suggestions. Sonja Musser Golladay was so kind to point out some remaining errors in my text. Not to forget, I am particularly grateful to Daniel E. O'Sullivan for his excellent achievements as editor.

<sup>2</sup> Hans and Siegfried Wichmann, *Schach: Ursprung und Wandlung der Spielfigur in 12 Jahrhunderten* (Munich: Callway, 1960).

<sup>3</sup> H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Chess* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 27. He adds later: "The game of chess was invented when some Hindu devised a game of war, and, finding the ashtāpada board convenient for his purpose, adopted it as his field of battle." (42) See also Jenny Adams, *Power Play: The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages*. The Middle

Chess has always enjoyed a much higher cultural status than most other (board) games, serving in many ways as a reflection of culture, education, intelligence, political skills, virtues, vices, and so forth. David Shenk cites thirteenth-century ibn Khallikan as a witness of the infinite intellectual power, seductiveness, and significance of chess: "When Sissa had invented chess and produced it to King Shiram, the latter was filled with amazement and joy. He ordered that it should be preserved in the temples, and held it the best thing that he knew as a training in the art of war, a glory to religion and the world, and the foundation of all justice."<sup>4</sup>

Hardly any culture and any people exposed to this game has ever been able to resist the fascination, if not obsession with, exerted by chess, as the world of the European Middle Ages amply indicated from early on, and as the evidence from subsequent centuries confirms as well.<sup>5</sup> But in order to illustrate the extensive metaphorical, symbolic, political, and philosophical implications of the chess game throughout the ages, let me begin with a short discussion of a most powerful twentieth-century novella in which chess assumes central importance as an icon, a metaphor, and as a most complex symbol of how man can get caught in social, political, and ideological constraints and then faces the danger of breaking down in that system.

Shortly before committing suicide on February 22, 1942, the Austrian Jewish writer Stefan Zweig completed his *Schachnovelle* (Chess Novella), reflecting upon the impact the Nazis had on the lives of individual people, and drawing from the game of chess the inspiration to illustrate how a person could be destroyed by the machinations and abuses of a dictatorial system.<sup>6</sup> In the novella, a conservative young man who, in his role as a lawyer, administers the estates of members of the old Austrian monarchy and aristocracy, is appre-

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Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), focusing, however, primarily on late-medieval English literature.

<sup>4</sup> David Shenk, *The Immortal Game: A History of Chess or How 32 Carved Pieces on a Board Illuminated Our Understanding of War, Art, Science, and the Human Brain* (New York, London, et al.: Doubleday, 2006), 13. See also Marilyn Yalom, *Birth of the Chess Queen: A History* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004)

<sup>5</sup> See the comprehensive article on "Schachspiel" (game of chess) in Johann Heinrich Zedler's famous *Grosses vollstaendiges Universal-Lexicon Aller Wissenschaften und Kuenste*. Vol. 34 (1742; Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1961–1964), 684–86. See also Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*. Vol. 8 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1898), 1956–68, for the terms "schach" to "schachzabel."

<sup>6</sup> Stefan Zweig, *Schachnovelle*, ed. Brian Murdoch. Methuen's Twentieth Century Texts (London: Methuen, 1986), 3: "On one level, *Schachnovelle* is a tense and exciting narrative, but at the same time it challenges the reader to think about the nature of man's subjection to the tyranny of chance and time." See also the edition of the text in Stefan Zweig, *Meisternovellen* (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 1970), 349–402.



hended by the Nazis and tortured by being kept all by himself for months without end in an almost sceptic hotel room with nothing to stimulate his mind. After more than half a year he happens to gain secretly possession of a chess book, and begins to learn all the moves and possible game strategies. Ultimately, however, he enters a stage of mental confusion, getting lost in more and more virtual chess games that he is schizophrenically playing against himself. The crisis really breaks out only later, once having been released from his cell and after having been treated by a medical doctor for his mentally disturbed mind. Getting involved in a real chess game against a world champion while fleeing the old world, he suddenly loses the connection to reality and gets very upset because his opponent is still playing the same game, whereas he has already moved into a very different one.

Whether we want to read Zweig's text as an expression of how traditional humanitarian values can get lost in a world of increased technical automation, as a protest against Nazi dictatorship, or fascism at large, or as an indication of man's infinite options, or lack thereof, to carve his life according to his own ideals and values, the author has basically presented the chess game as a symbol that requires ever new interpretations because of its infinite possibilities that the individual can pursue, though still limited by the chessboard and the rules according to which the pieces can move around.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, chess is not necessarily harmless and simply a playful and enjoyable game, as many German and other writers have observed.<sup>8</sup> Instead, playing

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<sup>7</sup> Murdoch, "Introduction," 30–34; he emphasizes that "Chess as play helps human beings overcome the twin tyrannies of fate and time, and if it will outlast books, they too can also serve to pass time" (33). See also his study "Game, Image and Ambiguity in Zweig's *Schachnovelle*," *New German Studies* 11, 3 (1983): 171–89; Donald G. Daviau, "Stefan Zweig's *Schachnovelle*," *Monatshefte* 65 (1973): 370–84. Most recently, Kai Berkes, "Nihilistische Freude am 'Unmöglichen': Sebastian Haffners 'Geschichte eines Deutschen' und Stefan Zweigs 'Schachnovelle' wollen den 'Wahnsinn' begreifen," *Text und Wahrheit: Ergebnisse der Interdisziplinären Tagung Fakten und Fiktionen der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Mannheim*, 28.–30. November 2002, ed. Katja Bär (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2004), 153–66. For an application of the chess, or more generally the game symbolism, to medieval literature, see Albrecht Classen, "Erotik als Spiel, Spiel als Leben, Leben als Erotik: Komparatistische Überlegungen zur Literatur des europäischen Mittelalters," *Mediaevistik* 2 (1989): 7–42; id., "Minnesang als Spiel. Sinnkonstitution auf dem Schachbrett der Liebe," *Studi Medievali*, Serie Terza, XXXVI, 1 (1995): 211–39. See also the intriguing, ultimately however rather speculative, study by Ursula Katzenmeier, *Das Schachspiel des Mittelalters als Strukturierungsprinzip der Erec-Romane*. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> *Porträt des Schachmeisters in Texten und Partien*, ed. Michael Ehn (Koblenz: H.-W. Fink, 1996); Jiri Veselý, "Das Schachspiel in der deutschsprachigen Literatur," *Deutsch-böhmische Literaturbeziehungen. Germano-Bohemica* (2004): 367–78; *Schachpartie durch Zeiten und Welten*, catalogue to the exhibit, ed. Hans and Barbara Holländer (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2005); for chess as a motif in paintings, see Marion Faber, *Das Schachspiel in der europäischen Malerei und*

chess can have considerable implications for the player's life, both as a mirror and as a practicing field, and it also indicates the player's particular level of education, wisdom, and ability to cope in life according to his/her moves on the board.<sup>9</sup>

In European literature poets began to incorporate the chess game as a significant symbol of courtly society at least since the eleventh century—perhaps even the Romans might have played chess, though it seems more likely that the game entered Europe only by the sixth or seventh century via the Arabs on the Iberian Peninsula,<sup>10</sup> whereas the Roman *ludus latronum* employed rather different rules and had no pieces as in chess.<sup>11</sup> Particularly didactic and moral writers enjoyed referring to the chess game because it functioned particularly well for their purposes, such as in the case of the English *Moralitas de scaccario* (before the middle of the thirteenth century), whereas the clergy was generally forbidden to play chess.<sup>12</sup> With the help of the chess allegory one could address especially moral and ethical themes, such as we can observe in the satirical *Li jus des esqués* by Engreban d'Arras (ca. 1295). John of Wales' *Breviloquium de virtutibus antiquorum principum* (ca. 1260–1270) pushed the interest in chess as an allegory even further, which then deeply influenced many other clerical writers throughout the late Middle Ages.<sup>13</sup> One of the most

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*Graphik (1550–1750)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998); Gerhard Josten, *Schach auf Ölgemälden* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Modern authors, such as Ronan Benett (*Zugzwang: A Novel* [New York: Bloomsbury, 2007]) and Mario Leoncini and Fabio Lotti (*Chi ha ucciso il campione del mondo?: scacchi e crimine* [Rome: Prisma, 2004]), have followed this tradition and continue to utilize the chess game as an excellent metaphor for life at large and society in specifics.

<sup>10</sup> Wolfram Runkel, *Schach: Geschichte und Geschichten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1995), 49–52.

<sup>11</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 394–96 (see note 3); Ferdinand Vetter, *Das Schachzabelbuch Kunrats von Ammenhausen, Mönchs und Leutpriesters zu Stein am Rhein. Nebst den Schachbüchern des Jakob von Cessole und des Jakob Mennel*, ed. Ferdinand Vetter. Bibliothek älterer Schriftwerke der deutschen Schweiz (Frauenfeld: J. Huber, 1892), XXIV.

<sup>12</sup> Vetter, ed., *Das Schachzabelbuch*, XXXIII (see note 11).

<sup>13</sup> Anežka Vidmanová, "Die mittelalterliche Gesellschaft im Lichte des Schachspiels," *Soziale Ordnungen im Selbstverständnis des Mittelalters*, ed. Albert Zimmermann. Miscellanea Mediaevalia, 12, 1 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1979), 323–55. H. Petschar, "Das Schachspiel in der Literatur; Schachbücher, Schachallegorien," *Lexikon des Mittelalters*. Vol. VII (Munich: LexMa Verlag, 1995), 1428–30; Richard G. Eales, *The History of a Game* (London: Batsford, 1985); Raymond D. Keene, *Chess: An Illustrated History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990). There is a plethora of similar studies that don't need to be cited here all. For specific approaches to chess with a focus on its symbolic meaning for late-medieval society, see Heike Bierschwale, Oliver Plessow, "Schachbrett, Körper, Räderwerk: Verräumlichte Gesellschaftsmetaphorik im Spätmittelalter," *Raum und Konflikt: Zur symbolischen Konstituierung gesellschaftlicher Ordnung in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Christoph Dartmann, Marian Füssel, and Stefanie Rüther. Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme: Schriftenreihe des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496, 5 (Münster: Rhema, 2004), 59–81.

famous books on chess was created in Spain by King Alfonso el Sabio (1221–1284), his *Libros de acedrex, dados e tablas*.<sup>14</sup> The history of chess literature, however, has continued ever since, whether we think of Marco Girolamo Vida's treatise *Scacchia Ludus* (1527), Eberhard Welper's *Das Zeit kurtzende Lust- und Spiel-Hauss* (1694), or F. D. Philidor's *Analyse du jeu des échecs* (1749, and many times thereafter, e.g., 1777).<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly, many miniaturists also included scenes of chess games into the manuscripts, such as in the *Les vœux du Paon* by Jacques de Longuyon, Tournai, ca. 1350,<sup>16</sup> since they offered great opportunities to illustrate common aspects of life at court, which must have directly appealed to their patrons.

The author of the probably most influential and widely disseminated treatise on this game, the *Liber de moribus hominum et de officiis nobilium super ludo scaccorum* (ca. 1275), Jacobus de Cessolis, originated from the province of Asti in northern Italy. Documents confirm that he belonged to the Dominican monastery of Genua between 1317 and 1322. His fellow brothers encouraged him to compose his chess book as an allegory of human society, in contrast to the traditional astronomical, moral, and religious orientation in the previous works on the game of chess. It was supposed to serve as a valuable resource for preachers and teachers insofar as the individual pieces are assigned particularly representative functions, irrespective of their specific roles in the chess game, such as peasants, craftsmen, merchants, medical doctors, apothecaries, etc., all in the class of ordinary people below the nobility. Altogether Jacobus relates 150 examples, 78 of which pertain to the aristocracy. Primarily he drew his material from classical sources, thereby adding secular material to the repository of religious narratives and miracle accounts usually employed by preachers for their sermons. Remarkably, Jacobus refrains from offering satires of monks, and he hardly criticizes women, as was rather common in the

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<sup>14</sup> For a useful introduction and survey, see the online encyclopedia article at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfonso\\_X\\_of\\_Castile](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfonso_X_of_Castile) and [http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfonso\\_X\\_el\\_Sabio](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfonso_X_el_Sabio); (last accessed on March 15, 2011); for a text edition, see Alfonso el Sabio, *Libros de acedrex, dados e tablas: Das Schachzabelbuch König Alfons des Weisen*, ed. Arnald Steiger (Geneva and Zürich-Erlenbach: Droz and Rentsch, 1941). See also Sonja Musser Golladay's Ph.D. dissertation, "Los libros de acedrex dados e tablas: Historical, Artistic and Metaphysical Dimensions of Alfonso X's Book of Games" (University of Arizona, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> See also the pleasant study by Ulrich Schädler, *Globusspiel und Himmelsschach: Brett und Würfelspiele im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 8–15.

<sup>16</sup> Today in the Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. G. 24, fol. 25v, see *Medieval Mastery: Book Illumination from Charlemagne to Charles the Bold: 800–1475*, ed. Lee Preedy and William Noel (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2002), 174.

didactic literature of his time. Overall, the virtues triumph over the vices, which certainly contributed to the wide distribution and translation of his *Liber*.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the earliest references to chess in the Latin *Ruodlieb* (second half of the eleventh century),<sup>18</sup> one of the best known German translators of Jacobus' s work were Heinrich von Beringen (ca. 1290–1300; 10,772 verses), Konrad von Ammenhausen (1337; 19, 336 verses), the Pfarrer zu dem Hechte (1355; ca. 6,700 verses), and Stephan von Dorpat (ca. 1357–1375; 5,886 verses), not counting several anonymous writers from the late fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries. They stayed very close to the original because Jacobus had created a very clear structure and a compact narrative that made variations unnecessary, if not impossible.<sup>19</sup>

The present paper, acknowledging much previous work on the chess game in the Middle Ages, aims for a careful analysis of a selection of relevant, nevertheless heretofore mostly ignored passages in Middle High German literature where the protagonist either observes such a game, or participates in it, or utilizes a chessboard, if not the pieces, for other purposes, all of that clearly indicating the fundamental significance of chess also for medieval German culture at large.<sup>20</sup>

The extensive significance of the chess game finds a wonderful expression in Gottfried von Strassburg's famous *Tristan* (1205) where the young protagonist, having lost both his parents and growing up incognito to protect him against his father's enemy, Morgan, one day is allowed to visit a ship where Norwe-

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<sup>17</sup> *Das Schachbuch des Jacobus de Cessolis: Codex Palatinus Latinus 961. Codices e Vaticanis selecti quam simillime expressi iussu Ioannis Pauli PP II consilio et opera curatorum Bibliothecae Vaticanae*, 74 (1458; Zürich: Belser Verlag, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Runkel, *Schach*, 59–62.

<sup>19</sup> Anton Schwob, "Schachzabelbücher," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*. Zweite, völlig neu bearb. Aufl., ed. Kurt Ruh et al. Vol. 8, 2 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1991), 589–91. See also the contributions to *Chess and Allegory in the Middle Ages: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Olle Ferm and Volker Honemann (Stockholm: Runica et Mediaevalia, 2005). The role of the chess game in secular, i.e., German medieval literature, however, has not yet been adequately addressed. See, however, Wolfgang Dittmann, "Zur Erfindung des Schachspiels im 'Schachzabelbuch': Die erzählte Primär-Rezeption bei Konrad von Ammenhausen," *Erzählungen in Erzählungen: Phänomene der Narration in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Harald Haferland and Michael Mecklenburg. Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur, 19 (Munich: Fink, 1996), 303–26. He emphasizes that for Konrad only the didactic function of the chess-game justified its acceptance for a cultured, ethically oriented society. For an art-historical approach, see Karl-S. Kramer, *Bauern, Handwerker und Bürger im Schachzabelbuch: Mittelalterliche Ständegliederung nach Jacobus de Cessolis* (Munich and Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1995).

<sup>20</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess* (see note 3), offers a large selection of text excerpts from medieval literature, but he seems not to have known German examples, apart from Wolfram von Eschenbach's version of Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*, *Parzival* (742) and a brief comment in a verse narrative, *Wittich vom Jordan*, by Rüdiger der Hünkhöver (753).

gian merchants offer a wide range of birds of prey for sale, which intrigues the young man more than anything else (2203ff.). Unfortunately, once he and his step-brothers all have received whatever bird they wanted, Tristan's eyes catch sight of a chessboard beautifully decorated and manufactured (2231–27).

Apparently being an extraordinary chess player himself, he immediately turns to the Norwegians and asks them in their own language, with which hardly anyone is familiar in that part of the world (2230–37), whether they know how to play that game (2230–32).<sup>21</sup> Astonished about his linguistic skills, they begin to realize his dazzling appearance, and one of them begins to play a round of chess with him (2243–47). No one from Tristan's companions, however, shows any interest in this entertainment, perhaps because they are not learned or cultured enough, and his step-father returns home, leaving only his tutor Curvenal with him who has to guard him (2254). The difference in education and sophistication between the young protagonist and the other members of the court could not find a better expression in this situation, whereas the merchants, possibly because they come from far away, quite curiously not only know how to play, they also realize something of Tristan's extraordinary character, considering his knowledge of languages, his learning, and his urbane qualities. They are actually more impressed about his whole comportment than about the chess game (2279–81), which they probably do not command as well as the young man in the first place.

Nevertheless, Tristan also coquets with numerous technical terms for chess playing never heard before (2289), and ultimately he has caught so much of their attention that they decide to kidnap him as a most valuable prize. Silently they lift the anchor and set the sails, and allow, if they are not forced to grant it, Tristan to win the chess game which entirely enraptures him, keeping him so busy that he notices nothing that is happening around him. However, this also involves his opponent, who is not part of the kidnapping scheme, so when they both finally get up, the ship is already far out into the open sea (2321). Only now does Tristan realize how much he has been deceived, and bitterly laments his sad destiny. He even goes so far as to curse the chess game: "owê wie wol

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<sup>21</sup> Here quoted from: Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*. Nach dem Text von Friedrich Ranke neu herausgegeben, ins Neuhochdeutsche übersetzt, mit einem Stellenkommentar und einem Nachwort von Rüdiger Krüger (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980). For an English translation, see Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*. Translated entire for the first time. With the surviving fragments of the *Tristan* of Thomas. With an Introduction by A. T. Hatto (1960; London: Penguin, 2004). There is a whole library of *Tristan*-Studies, see, for example, *A Companion to Gottfried von Strassburg's "Tristan,"* ed. Will Hasty. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2003). Tristan's playing of chess, however, has not attracted much attention, perhaps because it seems to be a standard form of entertainment for members of the courtly world. See Lambertus Okken, *Kommentar zum Tristan-Roman Gottfrieds von Strassburg*. Vol. 1. Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur, 57 (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1984), 150–52.

haete ich verborn / mîn veigez schâchzabelspil, / daz ie iemer hazzen wil!" (2592–94; alas, it would have been good if I had renounced my evil chess game which I want to hate from now on). But it is too late, and the merchants journey on, not knowing, of course, that soon enough, through God's intervention, they will be forced to release their captive, who then will have the chance to meet his uncle, King Marke.<sup>22</sup>

Curiously, although he displays many different skills at the new court and soon enough turns into the favorite of everyone because of his musical and linguistic abilities, and also his artistic skills in carving up the carcass of a hunted deer, as an example of his artistic powers, Tristan will never turn to the game of chess, either because he has learned his lesson and knows about the danger that this game might involve, or because he does not meet anyone who could match his mastery of playing chess, or, which would be an attractive speculation, because Tristan has turned away from simply playing chess and transformed into a piece on the metaphorical chessboard of life, operating with threatening forces, building support, moving around, attacking, defending himself, and ultimately winning the highest prize, the princess Isolde.<sup>23</sup>

If playing chess proves to be highly symbolic of Tristan's precarious existence, himself being nothing but a chess piece on the playing board of love—if we may use this metaphor for this end—despite all of his ardent efforts to control his own life and to manipulate his social environment, chess emerges in a very different context in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (ca. 1205). Here Parzival's friend, Gawan, at one point tries to engage in a sexual affair with lady Antikonîe, but he is perceived as an enemy and a threat to the kingdom's honor. While the couple is about to experience intimate pleasure, they are suddenly attacked by the ordinary people who suspect him to be a traitor and a danger to their country. When an old knight shouts out aloud, accusing Gawan of trying to rape Antikonîe, a whole swarm of irate men rushes up to him, forcing Gawan and his lady to retire into a tower because he has no weapons with him. But even there he seems to be helpless, until finally the queen finds a chessboard and hands it over to him. This serves him exceedingly well at least to defend himself successfully, until they are finally

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<sup>22</sup> It is one of the last moments in Tristan's life where he does not keep control and lets his guard down. Subsequently, he is always in charge and manipulates everyone around him until, finally, love entraps him as well, at which moment he then gets confused and no longer knows how to continue with his life. Surprisingly, *Tristan*-scholarship has hardly paid attention to the rather significant motif of the chess game. Tomas Tomasek, *Gottfried von Straßburg* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007), 76–77, mentions it, but does not provide any further comments.

<sup>23</sup> Molly Robinson, "Tristan: A Story of Precarious Belonging," *Tristania* XVIII (1998): 1–16, though she does not address the concept of chess as such, she certainly highlights Tristan's lack of stability, his constant moves: "he is constantly displacing himself" (11).

rescued from their predicament by Count Kyngrimursel, Antikonîe's cousin, who had pledged to Gawan absolute security as his host.<sup>24</sup>

The chessboard, and that is the only object that interests us here, is made out of stone, heavy, and large, and the pieces quickly prove to be quite effective tools in the hand of the lady: "ez wære künec oder roch, / daz warf si gein den vînden doch: / ez was grôz und swære. / man sagt von ir diu mære, / Swen dâ erreichte ir wurfes swanc, / der strûchte âne sînen danc" (Book 408, 29–30 – Book 409, 1–4; whether it was a king or a rook, she threw it against the enemies: each figure was large and heavy. People say about her that whoever was hit by a piece swung at him by her, fell down immediately). The chessboard itself is only described as extensive in its measure, with the contrasting colors elegantly inlaid (Book 408, 21), and the whole board strong enough to serve Gawan as a solid shield. The narrator also comments that the board was used heavily in this situation, ironically referring to the attacks with swords: "ûf disen vierecken schilt / was schâchezabels vil gespilt" (Book 408, 25–26; on this square shield many games of chess were played).

For Wolfram it is not the chess game by itself what matters; instead he resorts to this metaphor in order to describe facetiously courtly society which has turned its aggression inside and struggles against its own members.<sup>25</sup> Whereas before this chessboard was used for peaceful battle strategies in playfulness, now it serves the deadly serious purpose to protect the protagonist from his opponents' strikes at him. Insofar as Antikonîe transforms the chess pieces into projectiles with which she effectively strikes down one opponent after the other, we grasp how much Wolfram projected courtly society as a sham because backbiting, mutual criticism and aggression, distrust, and lack of confidence seem to dominate the court. Of course, the existence of a chess game in that tower to where Gawan and his lady have withdrawn in their desperation, struggling against people below their own class, characterized as ignoramuses or as sycophants, indicates that traditional courtly culture, specifically represented by the chess game, seems to have resorted to a remote tower room, and can now only be of use effectively if it is transformed into a military defense gadget. Ironically, the metaphorical pieces, most of which

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<sup>24</sup> For a broad discussion of Gawan's amatory adventures, see Martin Jones, "The Significance of the Gawan Story in *Parzival*," *A Companion to Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival*, ed. Will Hasty. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1999), 37–76; here 47–49. He assumes that Gawan's use of the chessboard signals the poet's criticism of his figure's overly anxious endeavor to embark on love making with Antikonîe. However, defending himself with the board also implies that all pieces on the board that are actually flying out of Antikonîe's hands against their crude opponents, hence all members of medieval society, are, so to speak, out of order, and chaos rules. See also the contribution to this volume by Jenny Adams.

<sup>25</sup> Renate Decke-Cornill, *Stellenkommentar zum III. Buch des 'Willehalm' Wolframs von Eschenbach*. Marburger Studien zur Germanistik, 7 (Marburg: Elwert, 1985), 190–92.

would be nothing but pawns, here have turned against the queen and, if we may say so, the bishop (Gawan). Sexual passion, in other words, has created a topsy-turvy world in which the feudal order is turned upside down, and can be recovered only with greatest difficulties when Kingrimursel intervenes who needs Gawan for the duel to cleanse a stain on his own honor.

But it is not the chess game itself that attracts the hero's attention. Whenever he has just a little breathing room, he gazes at Antikonie, whose body inspires ever more burning sexual desire in him (Book 409, 33–Book 410, 9).<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the board itself provides him with protection, and his adventure here seems to be just another move on the chessboard, metaphorically speaking, since the narrator specifically comments that many games used to be played on it, whereas “now it was badly hacked away.”<sup>27</sup>

We can preliminarily conclude that the chess game is mentioned so commonly in medieval German courtly literature because it served so exceedingly well as a symbol of courtly society, its values, and ideals, but then also of its failures and possible breakdown.<sup>28</sup>

In the famous early fourteenth-century collection of Middle High German courtly poetry, the *Manesse Liederhandschrift*, Margrave Otto IV of Brandenburg (1266–1309) is shown playing chess with a lady. Both hold a piece in their hand which they have obviously won from each other, and yet both point with their finger toward the game, disputing, as it seems, either a strategy or arguing over the properness of a move.<sup>29</sup> Here, the intricacies of courtly love find their

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<sup>26</sup> Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*. Studienausgabe. Mittelhochdeutscher Text nach der sechsten Ausgabe von Karl Lachmann. Übersetzung von Peter Knecht. Einführung zum Text von Bernd Schirok (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998). For an English translation, see Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. A. T. Hatto (London: Penguin, 1980). It does not seem to be the case that, surprisingly to note, any Wolfram scholar has ever fully explored the symbolic meaning of the chessboard in Gawan's hands. For a discussion of Gawan's relationship with Antikonie, see Herta Zutt, “Gawan und die Geschwister Antikonie und Vergulaht,” *Gotes und der werlde hulde. Literatur in Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Festschrift für Heinz Rupp zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Rüdiger Schnell (Bern: Francke, 1989), 97–117. See also Petrus W. Tax, “Die Liebe zwischen Gawan und Antikonie im 8. Buch von Wolframs ‘Parzival’. Politische und dynastische Hintergründe,” *Festschrift für Herbert Kolb zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Klaus Matzel and Hans-Gert Roloff, together with Barbara Haupt and Hilkert Weddige (Bern and New York: Lang, 1989), 702–12. See also Christoph J. Steppich, “Zu Wolframs Vergleich der Antikonie mit der Markgräfin auf Burg Haidstein (Pz. 403,21–404,10),” *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Älteren Germanistik* 53 (2000): 187–30; here 204–06 and 223–24.

<sup>27</sup> Hatto's translation, 210 (see note 21).

<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, scholarship seems not to have found it worth closer analysis. Joachim Bumke, *Höfische Kultur: Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), Vol. 1:304, offers only fleeting references.

<sup>29</sup> *Codex Manesse: Die Miniaturen der Großen Heidelberger Liederhandschrift*, ed. Ingo F. Walther, together with Gisela Siebert. 4th ed. (1988; Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1989), 12–13. For an online version, see <http://www.tempora-nostra.de/tempora-nostra/manesse.php?id=203&tfl=6>. This



appropriate expression in the complexity of the chess game where both sides face each other on an equal level and struggle to win an advantage over the other, although only playfully, and ultimately, as we may assume, to achieve harmonious agreement despite the loss of one side to the other because of their love relationship.

The common reference to the chess game in medieval German literature easily confirms its significant cultural relevance for courtly society at large.<sup>30</sup> Not surprisingly, we also discover an exquisite illustration in the famous *Carmina Burana* (ca. 1220–1250) focusing on the chess game, accompanying, as to be suspected, an entire poem in medieval Latin dedicated to the game of chess and the basic rules to be followed (fol. 92r). The poet explicitly sings a song of praise on the chess game which he identifies as a noble game: “Qui uult egregium scachorum noscere ludum / Audiatur. ut potui, carmina composui” (1–2; He who wants to learn the noble game of chess, listen to the song that I have composed as well as I could).<sup>31</sup> But he also warns his listeners that sometimes the small pieces, viz. the small people, can beat the big pieces, viz. the big people: “a dompnis minimi, domini rapiuntur ab himis: / Sic mixtim procerum, turba perit peditum” (31–32; the little one are beaten by the lords, the lords are beaten by the little ones; thus the group of nobles and the group of plain folks get lost)—a philosophical conclusion certainly influenced by Boethian thinking. Not surprisingly, many other medieval artists often refer to the symbolism of chess, which forces us to ponder more in depth what the literary statements might imply.<sup>32</sup>

These observations, however, also apply to most other medieval courtly societies, as Nicholas Orme confirms: “Chess had a higher status than other board games, because it was regarded as educational. Its pieces were seen as emblematic of society: king, queen, knights, judges, rooks (executive officers), and common folk, each having its own function and all being effective when working together. There were books explaining the method of play and expounding its relevance to the understanding of human affairs.”<sup>33</sup>

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image seems to contradict slightly the findings by Jenny Adams in her contribution to this volume.

<sup>30</sup> *Schach im abendländischen Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit : Alltagskultur, Spielspezifik, Hohe Literatur: Symposium der Initiativgruppe Königstein, Hamburg November 1999: Informationsmappe*, ed. Egbert Meissenburg (n. l.: n. p., 1999).

<sup>31</sup> *Carmina Burana. Texte und Übersetzungen. Mit den Miniaturen aus der Handschrift und einem Aufsatz von Peter und Dorothea Diemer*, ed. Benedikt Konrad Vollmann. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 13 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987), No. 210, 658–62. The song seems to have been composed by the end of the eleventh century (1236).

<sup>32</sup> Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 107, 109, 124–25.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 178.

In fact, the fame of chess had made it into such a well-known item for courtly entertainment during the high Middle Ages that even fleeting references to “schâch” (check!) would have been immediately understood.<sup>34</sup> The famous poet of gnomic verses and erotic songs, Walther von der Vogelweide (fl. ca. 1190–1220), for instance, once expressed his great disgust with the way how the world had changed to the worse, with materialism and greed having taken over honor, hospitality, friendship, and all traditional ideals of courtly values: “diu meiste menige enruochet, wie sî erwirbet guot. / sol ichz alsô gewinnen, sô gâ slâfen, hôher muot” (No. 12, I, 3–4; 31, 15–16; “The mass of them [the majority of all people] don’t care how they acquire worldly goods. / If I went after goods that way, then go to sleep, high-mindedness!”).<sup>35</sup> In the subsequent stanza, “Sît willekomen, herre wirt’, dem gruoze muoz ich swîgen” (12, II; 31, 23), he explores how people are treating each other when they meet in the evening and someone needs a place to stay. Walther laments that hosts no longer observe any traditional values and mistreat foreigners and travelers: “wirt unde heim sint zwêne unschamelîche namen” (II, 3; 31, 25; “*Master, House*—there’s no embarrassment in either name”). Instead, the relationships among people have become entirely commodified, and no one likes to welcome a stranger any longer: “gast unde schâch kumt selten âne haz” (II, 9; 31, 31; “*Guest*, and *Check!*: these words are never heard without disgust”). In utter disappointment, Walther then turns to the emperor and appeals to him for help, which ultimately would also be of profit for himself: “herre, bûezet mir des gastes, daz iu got des schâchez bûeze” (II, 10, 32; “Lord, liberate me from being a guest, so that God may help you get out of that *Check!* position”).

In essence, Walther seems to plead with Emperor Otto to help him secure a stable existence, or to provide him with a secured income, or an estate for his sustenance, but for our purposes it is significant that he reminds the emperor of his own political predicament, the details of which do not interest us here, but which put both on the same level of existential challenges. The artist Walther wants to be acknowledged as an equal with other high ranking persons at court because of his poetic accomplishments, hence the reference to the chess game in which, apparently, the emperor, as one of the pieces, is stuck in a dangerous situation, if not already a “Check.”<sup>36</sup> Particularly because of the brief, hardly

<sup>34</sup> Jenny Adams, *Power Play* (see note 3).

<sup>35</sup> Walther von der Vogelweide, *Leich, Lieder, Sangsprüche*. 14., völlig neubearbeitete Auflage der Ausgabe Karl Lachmanns mit Beiträgen von Thomas Bein und Horst Brunner, herausgegeben von Christoph Cormeau (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1996), 61; the English translation is taken from Walther von der Vogelweide, *The Single-Stanza Lyrics*, ed. and trans., with introduction and commentary by Frederick Goldin (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 183.

<sup>36</sup> Günther Schweikle, in: Walther von der Vogelweide, *Werke: Gesamtausgabe*. Vol. 1: *Spruchlyrik*. Mittelhochdeutsche / Neuhochdeutsche. Herausgegeben, übersetzt und kommentiert von Günther Schweikle (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994), 423–24.

noticeable allusion to chess, we can assume with certainty that the metaphor was well known among the courtly audiences where the game itself obviously enjoyed considerable popularity.

Playing chess could also represent a ruler's intelligence and political foresight, as in the case of Charlemagne as portrayed by the Priest Konrad in his version of the *Chanson de Roland*, in his *Rolandslied* (ca. 1170). When the Muslim emissaries arrive at the emperor's court in order to appeal to his mercy and to strike a peace agreement with their ruler, they meet him while he is pondering a chess game: "si vunden den keiser zwâre / ob deme schâchzable" (681–82; they found the emperor, indeed, sitting at the chessboard).<sup>37</sup> We are not told whether the emperor is actually playing the chess game, but he appears like a divine figure controlling the moves of all of his pieces: "nieman ne was ime gelîch. / sîn antlizze was zierlîch" (691–92; no one was his equal. His face was beautiful).<sup>38</sup>

Although the narrator does not develop this reference any further, the context clearly indicates how much a worthy ruler of the stature of Charlemagne properly practices his diplomatic skills, his strategizing abilities, and his military planning with a chess game. As the example from Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Willehalm* (ca. 1218–1220) indicates, the chessboard could also serve as measure to calculate the actual number of enemies that one would face on the battle field (151, 1–6).<sup>39</sup>

In the anonymous late thirteenth-century *Reinfried von Braunschweig*, which at first focuses on the ideals of virtuous love, marriage, marital loyalty, and family, and in the second part takes the protagonist on most extensive travels through the world of the Orient, accompanied by his new-found friend, the Persian prince whom he respects quite irrespective of the difference in their

<sup>37</sup> *Das Rolandslied des Pfaffen Konrad*. Mittelhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch, ed., trans., and commentary by Dietrich Kartschoke (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993).

<sup>38</sup> In the adaptation by the mid-thirteenth-century author Der Stricker, *Karl der Große*, the emissaries encounter the same situation, with Charlemagne sitting at a table and playing chess, though here an opponent sits across from him who, though "only" a duke, also receives great respect: "dâ si den keiser vunden. / ob eime schâzabel was daz, / daz er mit Gêrolde saz, / dem herzogen von Swâben, / dem sîne tugende gâben / werdekeit mit lobes kraft" (1242–47; where they found the emperor. He sat at a chess game with Gerold, Duke of Swabia who was graced by his virtues to receive great praise). *Karl der Grosse von dem Stricker*, ed. Karl Bartsch. With an epilogue by Dieter Kartschoke. Deutsche Neudrucke. Reihe: Texte des Mittelalters (1857; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965). See also Dittmann, "Zur Erfindung des Schachspiels im 'Schachzabelbuch,'" 323–24.

<sup>39</sup> Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Willehalm*. Nach der Handschrift 857 der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen. Middle High German Text, Trans., Commentary, ed. Joachim Heinze. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 9 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1991).

religious beliefs,<sup>40</sup> we also hear, even if only so fleetingly, of the game of chess as an essential aspect of courtly entertainment.<sup>41</sup> In order to grasp the larger context, let us consider the description of the court festivities in detail:

Sorgen und ouch fröuden<sup>42</sup> blôz  
 wâren sî: nu was sô grôz  
 daz tanzen und daz springen,  
 daz sagen und daz singen,  
 der schal was grôz und was dâ klein.  
 sô wurfen jene dort den stein,  
 sô zugen dis schâhzabelspil.  
 sô schuzen jene zuo dem zil,  
 sô sach man dis dâ springen.  
 sô wolten jene ringen,  
 sô sach man wie dis spilten  
 ald mit den kugeln zilten.  
 sô seiten die von minne,  
 dis von guot gewinne  
 und aber die von ritterschaft. (2899–913)

[Free of all worries and concerns  
 they all were. They turned their attention  
 to dancing and leaping,  
 to telling stories and singing of songs.  
 The room was filled with great noise.  
 Some of them competed against each other in stone throwing,  
 others moved pieces on a chessboard.  
 Some practiced shooting with the arrow,  
 while others could be seen leaping.  
 Some enjoyed wrestling,  
 and some played games  
 or threw balls toward a goal.  
 A group of them told each other stories of love,  
 others talked about how to gain riches,  
 and others again about chivalry.]

Undoubtedly, chess was not the only form of entertainment, but it was also not the least one. In general, as this scene reflects, playing chess belonged to

<sup>40</sup> Albrecht Classen, "Tolerance in the Middle Ages? The Good Heathens as Fellow Beings in the World of *Reinfried von Braunschweig*, Konrad von Würzburg's *Partonopier und Meliur*, and *Die Heideninne*," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 61 (2006): 183–223.

<sup>41</sup> *Reinfried von Braunschweig*, ed. Karl Bartsch (1871; Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York: Georg Olms, 1997); for the most comprehensive recent critical study, see Wolfgang Achtnitz, *Babylon und Jerusalem: Sinnkonstituierung im "Reinfried von Braunschweig" und im "Apollonius von Tyrland" Heinrichs von Neustadt*. Hermaea. Germanistische Forschungen. Neue Folge, 98 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002). He does not, however, explore the meaning of the chess game in *Reinfried*.

<sup>42</sup> The word "fröuden" (joys) here must be a mistake, considering the context.

publicly recognized courtly culture, and it was as much enjoyed as physical activities or as courtly love songs. The courtly world appreciated both physical competitions and intellectual challenges, explorations of emotional issues and tales of chivalric adventures. Moreover, chess was a form of entertainment practiced both by knights and ladies, as the various manuscript illustrations and the textual examples indicate.

Most unexpectedly, in some courtly narratives we also come across the chessboard as an analogy for an architectural design of a checkered wall.<sup>43</sup> In *Herzog Ernst B* (ca. 1220), for instance, the protagonist, after having been forced by Emperor Otte to leave Germany and after having visited Constantinople on his way to the Holy Land, gets lost and suddenly arrives in the mystical country of Grippîa, the land of crane people. At that moment, however, their city is entirely deserted because they are on a warfare against the King of India. For Ernst and his companion Wetzel, who enter the castle alone, it seems to be like a wonderland, considering the unseen marvels of buildings, places, structures, and furnishings. They are particularly attracted by the castle and its incredible wall:

diu was harte tiure  
 von edelem marmelsteine.  
 die wâren algemeine  
 gel grüene und weitîn,  
 daz sie niht schœner mohte sîn,  
 swarz rôt und wîze:  
 dâ mite was sie ze flîze  
 geschâchzabelt und gefieret,  
 . . . (2216–23)

[it was most precious made  
 out of marble stones.  
 They were all  
 yellow, green, and blue,  
 and they could not be more beautiful,  
 black, red, and white:  
 with these colors the was diligently  
 made like a chessboard, very orderly,<sup>44</sup>  
 . . . ]

More allusions are not necessary for the audience to understand the imagery conveyed here. Although the Grippians are certainly not part of the traditional

<sup>43</sup> Vetter, *Das Schachzabelbuch*, XXXVII–XXXVIII (see note 11).

<sup>44</sup> Sowinski (127) translates the participle “geschâchzabelt” as ‘like a mosaic,’ which fits only generally, but ignores the specific cultural connotation of the chess game.

courtly world, distanced from the West both through their hybridity as crane people and their lack of civil behavior toward outsiders,<sup>45</sup> their city, their courtly trappings, and particularly this reference to the chessboard intimately connects them, as it seems at first sight, with the Europeans. However, the reference to the chessboard appears only on the outside, and it might as well be nothing but a graphic design which the original architect did not perceive as a chessboard. However, the viewer, and in this case Duke Ernst and his companion Wetzel, understand it as such, which makes the entire set-up of the kingdom of Grippia even more uncanny, being so familiar to a courtly person through the external architectural features, and so unfamiliar, if not grotesque, in the practical experience with these hybrid creatures. The irony consists of their usage of the same symbolic language as traditional courtly society, but they are nevertheless cast as monstrous and dangerous to human civilization, which later leads to a brutal battle in which scores of Grippians are killed mercilessly.

The totally opposite situation is the case in Konrad von Würzburg's *Engelhard* (ca. 1270 or 1280) where the two protagonists, young men who have recently learned the ropes of courtly life and quickly practice the essential skills almost to perfection, also get engaged in playing chess:

Swâ mite ein man ûf erden  
ze hove liep sol werden,  
daz kunden si wol trîben.  
lesen unde schrîben  
sach man si beide schône.  
in süezer stimme dône  
seitens unde sungên.  
si tanzten unde sprungen.  
si schuzzen ouch ze deme zil.  
schâchzabel unde seitenspil  
kundens ûzer mâzen wol. (747–57)<sup>46</sup>

[Whatever skill here on earth  
can make a man much liked at court,  
they knew how to practice it well.

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<sup>45</sup> For global perspectives on hybridity, see Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); for *Herzog Ernst*, see Albrecht Classen, "Medieval Travel into an Exotic Orient: The *Spielmannsepos* *Herzog Ernst* as a Travel into the Medieval Subconsciousness," *Lesarten. New Methodologies and Old Texts*, ed. Alexander Schwarz. Tausch, 2 (Frankfurt a. M., New York, and Paris: Lang, 1990), 103–24; id., "Multiculturalism in the German Middle Ages? The Rediscovery of a Modern Concept in the Past: The Case of *Herzog Ernst*," *Multiculturalism and Representation. Selected Essays*, ed. John Rieder, Larry E. Smith (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 198–219; See now also Rasma Lazda-Cavers, "Hybridity and Liminality in *Herzog Ernst*," *Daphnis* 33, 1–2 (2004): 79–96.

<sup>46</sup> Konrad von Würzburg, *Engelhard*, ed. Paul Gereke. 2nd ed. by Ingo Reiffenstein. *Altdeutsche Textbibliothek*, 17 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1963).

They were both seen reading and writing  
 in a beautiful fashion.  
 with a sweet voice  
 they spoke and sang.  
 They danced and leaped.  
 They shot with arrows toward a goal.  
 Playing chess and string instruments  
 they knew exceedingly well.]

Konrad also employs the noun of 'chessboard' in an adverbial position in the verse narrative "*Das Turnier von Nantes* where a lord from Brittany displays a shield painted in the checkered colors of white and red, just like a chessboard: "blanc unde rôet schâchzabeleht / wart sîn glanzter schilt gesehen" (594–95).<sup>47</sup> Whereas playing chess, and also displaying the chessboard in a decorative manner by members of chivalry obviously meets full approval, those who employ this design for architectural purposes only and do not demonstrate the same value system represented by the chess game, such as the Grippians, are harshly condemned and deemed worthy for being killed in a brutal conflict.

The late twelfth-century didactic poet Herger referred to the chess game to illustrate the untrustworthiness and foolishness of some people, here represented by a wolf:

Ein wolf und ein witzic man  
 sazten schâchzabel an,  
     si wurden spilnde umbe guot  
     der wolf begonde sînen muot  
         Nâch sînem vater wenden.  
             dô kom ein wider dar gegân,  
             dô gap er beidiu roch umbe einen venden.<sup>48</sup>

[A wolf and a smart man  
 set up a chess game,  
     they intended to play for a prize.  
     The wolf began to turn his mind  
         to the manner practiced by his father.  
         When a ram appeared,  
         he gave away both his rooks for a pawn.]

The entire context addresses the problem of trusting foolish, treacherous, and dangerous people (the wolf), and the other stanzas illustrate this by referring to a wolf who is charged with taking care of the domestic animals but devours

<sup>47</sup> Konrad von Würzburg, *Kleinere Dichtungen*, ed. Edward Schröder. With an epilogue by Ludwig Wolff. Vol. II: *Der Schwanritter, Das Turnier von Nantes* (1925; Dublin and Zürich: Weidmann, 1968).

<sup>48</sup> *Des Minnesangs Frühling*, ed. Hugo Moser and Helmut Tervooren. Vol. I: *Texte*. 38th, revised ed. (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1988), VII (Herger), No. III, stanza 2 (27, 20).

them instead. Here, however, the wolf finds his powerful opponent in a smart man who sees through his opponent's evil nature and greed, and then utilizes this knowledge to outplay him in the chess game.

Not surprisingly, other didactic writers such as Hugo von Trimberg (ca. 1230–after 1313), also resorted to the imagery of the chess play in order to address fundamental concerns of their society, its value system, and the principles of morality, ethics, and vices and virtues.<sup>49</sup> In his *Renner* (ca. 25,000 verses) he deals with a vast array of topics, developing, so to speak, a panorama of human life. A number of times he also refers to the chess game either as a simile or symbol, or as a metaphor and analogy. Once, for instance, Hugo, very close to Walther von der Vogelweide's concern, laments about those people who know nothing about hospitality and treat everyone most miserly and aggressively.

First, however, Hugo comments that he had never been able to learn two things in life, that is, to share a table happily with someone whose heart is filled with wrath (5847–48), and to greet someone joyfully who had done something most painfully against him (5849–50). According to a book *Pilgerin* which he cites fleetingly, there are many different types of hosts, and one of the worst would be he who uses bread pieces to play chess on a table: “Dâ man mit brôtes snitzen / Schâchzabel ziuhet über dem tische!” (5356–57). Adding to the facetious imagery, he remarks that it would be great, of course, if he then could capture a king (5358) or a rook (5859). If, however, he were then to win a “venden” (5360; pawn), he would not be able to satisfy his hunger. Courtly society requires general hospitality to be upheld, but those who would be “ûzen [. . .] wirt, dâ heime gast” (5362; outside a host, at home a guest) could not claim any honor and would deserve to be despised for their lack of courtly manners.

But Hugo went one step further and formulated global criticism of the failings of this world, emphasizing, for instance, the great advantage of carrying out dutifully one's work instead of pursuing nothing but leisure, whether on a regular free day or on a holiday: “Des ist vil bezzer guot arbeit / Denne schedelichiu müezikeit” (22531–32; good is much better work than hurtful [sinful] free time). Hardly anyone is still seriously thinking of God and prays to him (22534–36), although many do write about Him and create religious paintings. True love of the Godhead, however, seems to be rather rare, as the poet avers (22538–40). In a preliminary conclusion, Hugo then notes:

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<sup>49</sup> For a recent introduction to Hugo, see Helmut Birkhan, *Geschichte der altdutschen Literatur im Licht ausgewählter Texte*. Part VIII: *Lehrhafte Dichtung zwischen 1200 und 1300*. Edition Praesens Studienbücher, 17 (Vienna: Edition Praesens, 2005), 51–63.



Disiu werlt ist als ein goukeltabel,  
 Wenn si hât als ein schâchzabel  
 Künige und dar zuo künigîn,  
 Roch, ritter, alten, vendelîn:  
 Des hât got wol sîn goukel spil  
 Mit uns, der ez rehte merken wil. (22541–46)

[This world is like a deceptive image,  
 because its has, like the chess game  
 kings and a queen,  
 rooks, knights, bishops, pawns:  
 In this way God plays a fool's game  
 with us, if you are able to notice that.]

He does not reject the traditional allegory of the chessboard as a symbol of human society, but he dismisses it in its illusionary character as much as he rejects the material world because God operates on this board according to His own will and does not allow anyone to control Him: "Der goukeler sprichet: 'Wider in die taschen', / Sô sprichet unser herre: 'Wider in die aschen, / Von der ir alle sît bekumen'" (22547–49; the player says: 'off with you into the pocket,' and our Lord says: 'back into the ashes where you all have come from').<sup>50</sup>

In another context, Hugo refers to the devil as a master player on the chessboard of life. Those who submit to evil thoughts, inspired by the devil, will eventually be defeated by him in that game: "Dem tuot der tiufel ofte schâch / Und mattet sîner sêlden spîl, / Swenn er sich selber niht hûeten wil" (15690–92; the devil often puts him at check, and checkmates the game of his happiness, if he does not want to protect himself). On a more mundane level, the poet warns his readers of the deadly sin of gluttony, here cast in the allegorical figures of "her Frâz und her Slunt" (10178; Sir Devouring and Sir Gorging). Those who stay in their service for too long, will soon face the same destiny as the one who loses a game of chess: "Den mattet ir oder tuot im schâch!" (10180; You checkmate him or put him in check!).

Quite similar in his criticism of the deceptiveness of this world, Konrad von Würzburg, whom I have already mentioned above, also comments on the knightly education, which includes the chess game and playing string instruments, but then notes that those things do not prepare the individual for the concrete demands of this world. The protagonist in *Der Welt Lohn* quickly has to realize how little the external appearances mean, and that the truth lies behind, or underneath. One day, for instance, a most beautiful lady appears who would outshine both Venus and Pallas Athena (74), and who provides

<sup>50</sup> Jutta Goheen, *Mensch und Moral im Mittelalter: Geschichte und Fiktion in Hugo von Trimbergs 'Der Renner'* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), 70–71.

him with most delightful entertainment all day long. In the evening, however, when she leaves him and turns her back to him, he suddenly has to learn that even she consists of nothing but simple flesh that is rotting away. Worms, snakes, toads, and other creatures are already eating away at here, and so the protagonist quickly learns to understand the illusionary character of this world, whom she represents (217–38).

In his epimythion, the poet alerts his audience to see through the mask worn by all external things and to discard the illusion that would lead the individual only down to Hell: “Von Wirzeburc ich Cuonrât / gibe iu allen disen rât, / daz ir die werlt lâzet varn, / welt ir die sêle bewarn” (271–74; I, Konrad of Würzburg, give this advice to you all to let go off this world if you want to preserve the soul).

The protagonist, however, at first does everything expected from a young courtly nobleman: “man sach den vil geslahten / ûzerweltiu cleider tragen. / birsen, beizen unde jagen / kunde er wol und treip sîn vil, / schâchezabel unde seitenspil / daz was sîn kurzewîle” (24–29; one saw the extraordinary man wear most splendid clothing. He knew well to go hunting and falconing, and he practiced it often; playing chess and string instruments were his entertainment). Although none of these activities and preferences are condemned specifically, the moralistic writer still implies his opposition and admonishes his audience to abstain from all those things and entertainments that would blind them to the true dangers for the soul. In this sense playing chess, despite its intellectual challenges, represents sinful diversion and would mislead the person even further into sinfulness.

Other didactic writers, such as the somewhat earlier Italian-German poet Thomasin von Zerclaere, who was a canon in Aquileia (near Trieste) and probably enjoyed close contacts with the German Patriarch of Aquileia, Wolfer von Erla (1204–1218), the patron of Walther von der Vogelweide,<sup>51</sup> also incorporated a reference to the chess game into his voluminous treatise, *Der welsche Gast* (The Italian Visitor), as an example of the need to learn certain rules in order to be able to play, or to operate individually on a more complex level within society.<sup>52</sup> Playing chess, in his perspective, represents highly developed skills, but skills that can be taught, meaning that the chess player

<sup>51</sup> Daniel Rocher, “Thomasin von Zerclære: ein Dichter . . . oder ein Propagandist im Auftrag?,” *Wolfer von Erla: Bischof von Passau (1191–1204) und Patriarch von Aquileja (1204–1218) als Kirchenfürst und Literaturmäzen*, ed. Egon Boshof and Fritz Peter Knapp. Germanische Bibliothek. Neue Folge. 3. Reihe: Untersuchungen, 20 (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1994), 325–43.

<sup>52</sup> For an excellent introduction to Thomasin in English, see Michael Resler, “Thomasin von Zerclære,” *German Writers and Works of the High Middle Ages: 1170–1280*, ed. James Hardin and Will Hasty. Dictionary of Literary Biography, 138 (Detroit, Washington, DC, and London: Gale Research, 1994), 133–40.

requires a teacher. However, everything that can be learned can also be improved, and one master teacher can always find his own master in this particular matter:

Swer wol schachzabel chan,  
                   der vindet dar nach einen man,  
 der sin also vil chan oder mere.  
                   ez ist dehein so chleine lere,  
 man mohte si lernen baz.                   (8883–87)<sup>53</sup>

[He who knows how to play chess well,  
                   will find another man  
 who knows as much about it as he, or even more.  
                   There is not even the smallest science  
 that could not be learned better.]

In other words, for Thomasin the game of chess proves to be an example of a sophisticated matter that requires in-depth learning, hence represents an outstanding object of advanced courtly culture. Of course, as these verses and the subsequent discussion illustrate, there would be nothing in this world that could not be improved, and every person would find his/her master in any area, which hence should teach the reader more humbleness and modesty. As the author emphasizes, extending the metaphor from the chess game to all aspects in life, nothing manmade could be regarded as truly superior because we do not even understand fully the smallest things in our earthen existence: “waz mach denn sin beliben / der grozen chuonste, die wir geschriben / haben, sit die chleiner / nimmer begriffet unser deheiner” (8889–92; what will remain of the great arts that we have written about since no one amongst us understands even the small things).

Although Thomasin refers to the chess game only fleetingly, it obviously proves to be of utmost significance for him and his audience since only the really learned would be capable of operating this game successfully, otherwise the metaphor would not work here.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Here quoted from: Thomasin von Zerclaere, *Der welsche Gast*. Vol. 1: *Einleitung, Überlieferung, Text, die Varianten des Prosa-vorworts*, ed. F. W. von Kries. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 425 I (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1984). See also Thomasin von Zerclaere, *Der welsche Gast secondo il Cod. Pal. Germ. 389, Heidelberg con le integrazioni di Heinrich Rückert e le varianti del Membr. I 120, Gotha (mit deutscher Einleitung)*, a cura di Raffaele Disanto. Quaderni di Hesperides. Serie Testi, 3 (Triest: Edizioni Parnaso, 2002).

<sup>54</sup> Christoph Huber, “Der werlde ring und was man tuon und lassen schol: Gattungskontinuität und Innovation in moral-didaktischen Summen: Thomasin von Zerclaere–Hugo von Trimberg–Heinrich Wittenwiler und andere,” *Mittelalter und frühe Neuzeit: Übergänge, Umbrüche und Neuansätze*, ed. Walter Haug. *Fortuna vitrea*, 16 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999), 187–212. See also the contribution to this volume by Jenny Adams regarding subtle misogynistic approaches to the game of chess both in the Middle Ages and still today.

He shares this perspective with a considerably later didactic Austrian poet, Heinrich der Teichner (fl. ca. 1350–1365, and later) who also incorporates the allegory of the chess game in one of his close to 800 rhymed stanzas, “Ye der man zu schafen hat” (no. 198).<sup>55</sup> At first he discusses the problem affecting those who enjoy much honor but also property, which means that they have to struggle much harder in striving for God’s love and yet still maintain the proper balance in their relationship with secular society (3–5). Money, in other words, creates problems, and only solves few (6–8).<sup>56</sup> In fact, as Teichner sees it, a simple farmer might have an easier life, settled on his land and able to sleep well at night, than a wealthy man who would have to worry even at night what to do with all his money (9–16). The discussion then turns to the chess game, and the poet equates rulership with the conditions on the chessboard. Each player simply watches out how to make the best move: “wie er ziehen mug und geben” (20; how he might move and give). Lords, however, like the main pieces in the chess game, have to worry constantly about their own position in life: “also ist der herren spech / zu allen zeiten mit gevaer” (22–23; thus the lords have to worry all the time about danger). Those who only watch the game do not have a vested interest and remain calm, as is the case with the farmer, whereas the rich people and noblemen have to suffer from childhood on (31–33).

Chess could also serve as a metaphor of wooing, erotic embraces, and even love making, as we discover in Heinrich von Neustadt’s (fl. early fourteenth century) version of the classical romance *Apollonius von Tyrland* (based on the late-antique *Apollonius of Tyre*).<sup>57</sup> Without exploring the wider context of this complex narrative that considerably expands the Latin model,<sup>58</sup> suffices here to focus on the relevant passage with its literary utilization of the chess game in

<sup>55</sup> For the most recent critical comments, see Albrecht Classen, “Heinrich der Teichner: The Didactic Poet as a Troublemaker, Whistle-Blower, and Social Rebel,” *Mediaevalia et Humanistica*. New Series 32 (2007): 63–81; id., “Money, Power, Poverty, and Social Criticism in the Work of Heinrich der Teichner,” to appear in *Studi medievali*.

<sup>56</sup> Dieter Kartschoke, “Regina pecunia, dominus nummus, her phenning. Geld und Satire oder die Macht der Tradition,” *Geld im Mittelalter*, ed. Klaus Grubmüller and Markus Stock (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005), 182–203; here 193–94.

<sup>57</sup> Heinrichs von Neustadt ‘Apollonius von Tyrland’ nach der Gothaer Handschrift. ‘Gottes Zukunft’ und ‘Visio Philiberti’ nach der Heidelberger Handschrift, ed. S. Singer. 2nd ed. Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters, VII (1906; Dublin and Zürich: Weidmann, 1967). See now also *Leben und Abenteuer des großen Königs Apollonius von Tyrus zu Land und zur See: Ein Abenteuerroman von Heinrich von Neustadt verfaßt zu Wien um 1300 nach Gottes Geburt*. Übertragen mit allen Miniaturen der Wiener Handschrift C, mit Anmerkungen und einem Nachwort von Helmut Birkhan (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2001), 393–39; Achnitz, *Babylon und Jerusalem*, 229–421 (see note 41).

<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth Archival, *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations. Including a text and translation of ‘The Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri’* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991).

order to reflect upon the common teasing, provoking, struggling for superiority, and yet tender and erotic relationship between man and woman:<sup>59</sup>

Sy hetten kurtzweyle vil.  
 Sy spilten schachzabel spil:  
 Der herre pegunde genenden,  
 Er zoch ainen venden,  
 Der sagte der kunigynne mat.  
 Was schadet das? deß wirt gut rat:  
 Uber ain kurtze zeyt syder  
 Sagt im di schone magt wider  
 Mat und das sine schach  
 Mer dann vierstunt dar nach. (18331–40)

[They had much entertainment.  
 They played chess with each other:  
 The man made a bold move,  
 he moved one of his pawns  
 with which he said 'check' to the queen.  
 What damage did that cause? Good advice was then needed:  
 In a short while in turn  
 the beautiful maid responded  
 with 'check' and 'checkmate  
 more than four times afterwards.]

In the world of wonders, however, where Apollonius has to operate most of the time, the chess game and its board also serves as an indicator of where the courtly and the monstrous intersect, similarly as in the much earlier *Herzog Ernst B*. At one point the protagonist comes across a couple of dwarf people—apparently a king and his queen, Pirmort and Pliades—who also represent hybridity in that both make a stunning impression through their bodily beauty despite their small size, but they seem to belong to the race of centaurs, with their lower body parts in the shape of a horse and their skin gleaming in the color of ivory (8265–75). They are related to other monsters that Apollonius, here figuring under the name of Lonius, had fought against before, but they are engaged most busily in a game of chess and do not realize the protagonist's arrival until it is too late (8276–80).<sup>60</sup> Whereas the battle of the minds on the chessboard happens without violence since the players belong to

<sup>59</sup> Achnitz, *Babylon und Jerusalem*, 354, note 413, assumes that the chess metaphor also serves as a reflection upon the vicissitudes of fortune, which does not quite seem to fit the actual rules of that game with its emphasis on strategizing, power struggle, and metaphorical battles of the wits.

<sup>60</sup> This actually correlates them to Tristan in Gottfried's eponymous romance; both times playing chess can also have dangerous consequences because those involved lose the connection to reality and become victims of the game itself.

the same race and are bonded together emotionally, that is, they are married to each other, they immediately fight against Apollonius, a representative of another race and an obvious enemy, with all their might. The king runs away, fetches a bow and arrows, while the monstrous queen hits him with her four legs, hurting him even in the groin, upon which he tosses her violently to the ground: "Wann es hett in geschlagen, / Das er niemand wolte sagen, / An ain haymlich statt" (8321–23; because she had hit him, what he did not want to tell anyone, at a secret spot).

After she has given him magical rings, he lets her go and is about to leave the place when he spots the chessboard (8371). The pieces prove to be so valuable to him that he takes them all with him, which causes an uproar in the nether world of the dwarves and monsters, all apparently deeply upset about this great loss. Moreover, they send in their worst weapons, dragons and other reptiles (8399), vipers and snakes (8401), and when the little king shouts out to his people that Apollonius has taken the pieces, a veritable fury breaks out: "'Er hatt da pey im meinen hort, / Das schachzabel gestaine, / Paide groß und klaine.' / Da war in allen auff in zoren" (8404–07; 'He has with him my treasure, the chessboard pieces, both the big and small ones.' This made them all very angry against him).

The subsequent battle proves to be the worst scenario the hero has ever experienced, with a dragon almost killing him, while the snakes and other creatures attach themselves to him, trying to drag him down and hold him back. However, with the help of a miracle root he regains his strength and ultimately defeats all his opponents. Unfortunately, as he notices too late once he has reached a river, in all the haste and struggle he lost one of the rooks, which grieves him considerably: "Das was im laid und zoren" (8490), although it does not really matter at the end. But the king of the dwarves apparently feels so badly hurt and robbed of his most precious treasure that he sends his entire army of dragons to capture Apollonius, though it is too late because he has already crossed the river and so left the world of wonders and monsters: "Ir land enhalb verflucht was, / Hie dißhalb was salig laub und graß" (8521–22; their country on this side was cursed, the other side was blessed with leaves and grass). The narrator then comments one more time about the significance of the chess pieces for the dwarf king: "Piramort dem was vil laid / Das er di staine hette verloren" (8528–29; Piramort was deeply grieved that he had lost the pieces).

The explanation for the magical importance of the chess game, the chessboard, and the pieces is not provided, except for several allusions to dark powers associated with them. It is, to be sure, the personal chess game from King Nebuchadnezzar's treasure, which could have a religious symbolism, although Heinrich von Neustadt hardly ever aims so high in his own

hermeneutics.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, as King Nemrot of Romania relates to him, the chess pieces are of greatest value, unmatched by any treasure either in the possession of the Sultan of Egypt or the King of Arabia (8777–80). For that reason, the loss of the rook represents a great loss about which future generations will have to cry, as he states (8767), though we do not learn exactly what this all might mean. We can be certain, however, that the chess game symbolizes the key to the rule over the world, and its owner could aim high in his endeavor to achieve all of his (evil) goals. Insofar as the dwarves had played the game, and then reacted so vehemently about the loss of the pieces, we may deduce that they perceive them as something of enormous value, perhaps as the most far-reaching instruments to gain mastery over all people and creatures on earth. Those who control the chessboard, also control the entrance to the castle, or the court, and insofar as Apollonius has gained hold of the chess pieces from the two hybrid dwarf figures, he had also acquired, in a sense, the key to the magical kingdom, now doomed to perish, even though the set of pieces was incomplete at the end.

At first very similar, though in a different generic context, Gâwein, in Heinrich von dem Türlin's almost contemporary *Diu Crône* (ca. 1300), observes a dwarf playing chess with a maid when he enters a castle:

Oben vor dem thurn saszen  
 Ein getwerc vnd ein meit;  
 Sie spieltent mit behendekeit  
 Schochzabel vf einem brett.  
 Gaweins sie wol war tet,  
 Als man jn in geliesz.  
 Mit groszem flijsze sie jne hiesz  
 Jr da wilkomen sin.  
 Darnach tet sie yme schijn,  
 Das ir der grúsz von herten ging.: (18797–806)<sup>62</sup>

[Up in front of the tower sat a dwarf and a maiden playing chess with great skill. The latter saw Gawein as soon as he came in, gave him a most cordial welcome, and then showed him that it came from the heart.<sup>63</sup>]

<sup>61</sup> For the Biblical figure, see the excellent article by Emil G. Hirsch, Ira Maurice Price, Wilhelm Bacher, and Louis Ginzberg, "Nebuchadnezzar," *Jewish Encyclopedia* 2002, online at: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=154&letter=N> (last accessed on March 15, 2011).

<sup>62</sup> Heinrich von dem Türlin, *Die Krone (Verse 12282–30042)*. Nach der Handschrift Cod. Pal. germ. 374 der Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg nach Vorarbeiten von Fritz Peter Knapp und Klaus Zatloukal, ed. Alfred Ebenbauer and Florian Kragl. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 118 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2005).

The difference to the situation in *Apollonius* then grows exponentially with regard to the function and symbolism of the chess game because the protagonist is well taken care of, receiving new clothes, and then is even invited by the maid to play the same game with her, offering him most delightful entertainment in a truly courtly fashion (18815–21). In other words, playing a round of chess amounts to paying highest respect to a guest, who is honored with the challenge of demonstrating his intellectual skills not only at a tournament, in the presence of courtly society, but also in the virtual world of chess, which allows him to prove his worthiness and wit to a lady of the court.

There is no doubt that medieval German poets had a keen understanding of the most meaningful symbolic functions of the chess game and its pieces. The variety of allegorical applications of chess for the representation of courtly society at large, but then also of courtly love, cultural transgression, military strategies, meditation and wisdom, and so forth, was almost infinite, which signals that the chessboard and its pieces powerfully served these poets and writers as some of the most fascinating and far-reaching literary images to reflect upon fundamental ideals, values, principles, and concepts determining courtly society and its relationship both to the lower classes and also to God.

In fact, chess enjoyed such a popularity that terms such as 'check' or 'checkmate' could serve as convenient metaphors to reflect upon misfortune and the sudden change of a person's course in life, such as in Heinrich von Freiberg's continuation of Gottfried von Strassbourg's *Tristan* from the late thirteenth century: "allen iren vroweden mat / wart da gesaget sunder schach" (1560–61; all their joys were checkmated without anyone playing chess). But the very opposite could also be the case, so when the lovers attempt to avoid the persecution of the jealous husband, as we find it in the same romance: "inr des der kunic sprach / zu der kuneginne: 'da schach!' / 'da schach!' sprach die kunegin, / 'hie buz mit dem ritter min!' / 'aber schach!' sprach der kunic san" (4155–59; in that moment the king said to the queen: 'here check!' 'check against it!', said the queen, 'my knight makes you pay for it!' 'Again 'check!' said the king then."<sup>64</sup>

These most varied observations can find additional confirmation through the actual chess treatises in verse, a number of which have come down to us by

<sup>63</sup> *The Crown: A Tale of Sir Gawain and King Arthur's Court* by Heinrich von dem Türlin. Trans. and with an introd. by J. W. Thomas (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 212.

<sup>64</sup> Heinrich von Freiberg, *Tristan und Isolde (Fortsetzung des Tristan-Romans Gottfrieds von Straßburg)*. Originaltext (nach der Florenzer Handschrift ms. B.R. 226) by Daniel Buschinger, trans. Wolfgang Spiewok. Wodan, 16 (Greifswald: Reineke-Verlag, 1993).



identifiable translators of Jacobus de Cessolis's *Liber*, whereas others have been preserved only anonymously, and then those in prose (there are three different versions, from which one shorter copy or edition was produced later).<sup>65</sup> The large number of manuscript copies and of early printed incunabula demonstrates the impressive popularity of the game and its allegorical function, and hence of the moral, ethical, and philosophical exploration of the chess game metaphor and its allegorical function.

These chess treatises in verse and prose have been discussed repeatedly in previous scholarship, so it would not be necessary to reexamine them here in any detail, especially because it would detract from the central concern of this paper. But it might be worth to allow one of the prose translators to speak up in the conclusion of our own investigation:

Das erst tail, darvmb daz schachtzabel sey funden. Daz erst cappittel des ersten tails ist, vnder welichem chünig daz spil funden sey. Daz erst capitel dez andern tails ist von dez chünig gestalt auf dem schachtzabel vnd von seinen siten, vnd was den chünig angehört. Daz ander von der chünigin, wie die sey gestalt, vnd auch von iren siten. Daz dritt ist von den alten vnd auch von iren siten. Daz vierd ist von den rittern vnd auch von iren siten vnd auch von iren ampten. Daz fünft ist von der gestalt der rochen, von iren siten vnd auch von iren ampten. Das erst capitel dez tritten tails ist von den pawlāwten. Daz ander ist von den smiden. Daz tritt ist von den wollwürchern. Daz vird von den chawflawten vnd von den wechslern. Daz fünft ist von den ärzten vnd von den apatekern. Daz sechst ist von den leitgeben vnd von den gastgeben. Daz sibent von den amptlawten vnd von stetpflegern vnd von der gemain. Daz acht von guftern, spilern vnd lötern.<sup>66</sup>

[The first part treats why the chess game was invented. The first chapter of the first part explains under what king the game was invented. The first chapter of the other part is about the king on the chessboard and of his manners, and what belongs to the king. The other chapter is about the queen, her appearance, and her customs. The third is about bishops and also about their manners. The fourth is about the knights and their customs and also about their offices. The fifth is about the figure of the rooks, their customs and also about their offices. The first chapter of the third part is about the builders. The other is about the blacksmiths. The third is about the wool workers. The fourth is about the merchants and the money lenders. The fifth is about the medical doctors and the apothecaries. The sixth is about the inn keepers and hospitality. The seventh is about estate managers and city administrators and the community. The eighth is about wasteful people, gamblers, and good-for-nothings.]

<sup>65</sup> Gerard F. Schmidt, ed. *Das Schachzabelbuch des Jacobus de Cessolis*, O.P. Texte des späten Mittelalters, 13 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1961), 8–10.

<sup>66</sup> *Das Schachzabelbuch*, 25 (see note 11). The narrator curiously mixes concrete names of chess pieces with references to ordinary people and their professions.

In other words, here we face a literary reflection of all of medieval society which is understood to operate on a board like the pieces of a chess game. There are rules and laws, and yet there is an infinitude of possible moves and combinations. Life, as described by the chess game, proves to be regulated and creative, constrained and flexible, it is a combination of strategies and moves, and each person finds himself or herself in a specific position where s/he can operate according to specific conditions and opportunities.

The plethora of references to the chess game in these medieval literary examples, however, has also indicated the much wider range of possible application of this extraordinary and timeless allegory. As Michael Camille confirms, "Chess was the perfect allegorical device because it articulated the playful tension and the often violent conflict inherent in the strategies of seduction that formed the medieval art of love. Associated with warfare, mathematics, and male rationality, the chessboard became a simulacrum of medieval society."<sup>67</sup> Indeed, we might say, in light of the evidence of medieval German literature, which certainly finds confirmation in other medieval and early-modern literatures, those who discussed the chess game and/or referred to it by way of allusion, allegory, symbolism, and metaphor, transformed the image of chess into a literary reflection of life in all of its complexities.<sup>68</sup>

Let's make a move with a piece, or life will result in a quick checkmate.

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<sup>67</sup> Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 124 (see note 32).

<sup>68</sup> Vetter, *Das Schachzabelbuch*, XLVIII–XLIX (see note 11).

## Chapter 2

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### Making Chess Politically and Socially Relevant in Times of Trouble in the *Schacktavelslek*

*Schacktavelslek* was probably written in the 1460s but the extant manuscripts are somewhat younger. It is not a translation of Jacobus de Cessolis' *Liber de ludo scaccorum* (ca. 1300) in the modern sense of the term, but rather a paraphrase or a free reworking of Jacobus de Cessolis' Latin version and some of the chess allegories in German, such as *Meister Stephans Schachbuch*, and some moralizing pieces from *De septem sapientibus*.<sup>1</sup> The original features of *Schacktavelslek* are the use of *knittelvers* (Germ. Knüttelvers; Engl. doggerel verse) and the Swedish author's omissions and additions with respect to his exemplars. The omissions are from the parts that deal with the pawns (only four pawns are mentioned, and those only in brief) and the didactic materials that are clearly judged as otiose, but unfortunately the technical rules of the game are also omitted. The additions, which take up between 20% and 25% of the Swedish text, deal with Swedish events for which the author provides commentaries.<sup>2</sup>

In her recent study of Jacobus' work, Jenny Adams argues that chess allegories contain "encoded anxieties about political organization, civic community,

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<sup>1</sup> Gunnar Blomqvist, *Schacktavelslek och Sju vise mästare. De ludo scaccorum. De septem sapientibus. Studier i medeltidens litteraturhistoria* (Stockholm: Hugo Gebers, 1941), 106, 110–131. *Schacktavelslek* is edited by Gustaf Edward Klemming, *Svenska medeltids dikter och rim. Samlingar utg. av Svenska Fornskriftsällskapet*, Bd 25 (Stockholm, 1881–1882), 200–312.

<sup>2</sup> Blomqvist, *Schacktavelslek*, 228–30 (see note 1); Olle Ferm, "Schacktavelslek. An international Bestseller and its Adaption into Swedish," *Chess and Allegory in the Middle Ages. A Collection of Essays*, ed. Olle Ferm and Volker Honemann. Scripta minora, 12 (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediaevalia 2005), 281–328; here 282–83.

economic exchange and individual autonomy.” Further, she claims that Jacobus breaks with the picture of the body politic as an organism the parts of which are held together by biological necessity, while the body politic in Jacobus’s imagined world is compiled by autonomous groups who have particular rules of behaviour. The body politic and the civic community are thus maintained by contractual obligations and not by biological functions. Inasmuch as the pieces represent separate status and professional functions, individuals and groups can see their civic obligations and rights.<sup>3</sup> To a certain degree, *Schacktavelslek* accords with Jenny Adams’s model as its author articulates his “anxieties about political organization” and the “civic community”, but his concern is first and foremost with the kingdom, emphasizing the interdependence and obligations within a hierarchical social order, and links groups and individuals together through their formal oaths. In this way, *Schacktavelslek* shares something in common with an exceptional feature of Cessoli’s *Liber*, as indicated by Adams. Both works diverge from the traditional view of the body politic as a biological organism, and instead, they develop a contractual perspective of the body politic and the civic community. In this ordering of society, laws, rules and oaths regulate social interaction. This common feature should not obscure the difference between the two works. The author of *Schacktavelslek* sees before him the agrarian society of feudal Sweden, while Cessoli contemplates the sophisticated urban society of Northern Italy, where trade and skilled crafts played a completely different role.

### The Underlying Idea of *Schacktavelslek*

The author of *Schacktavelslek* develops the idea that chess can be used as an allegory to show individuals and groups how to live virtuously. The board and its pieces have parallels in society, and just as the game has rules that have to be followed to avoid defeat, so too, there are rules for social interaction so that society may be upheld and prosper.

The allegorical reading which a social and political understanding of the game presupposes is indicated in the introduction:

tha fan han aa tässa liist,  
skaftauels lek och thz war wist  
han gewfer j leken tässa läre  
hurw man skal lefua mz ärä /.../  
hurw the mz ära skulo sik haalla  
som märkis mz leksens tauil /.../

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<sup>3</sup> Jenny Adams, *Power Play. The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages*. The Middle Ages Series. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 2–4, 19–22, 33–43, 47–55.

the skulo och framdelis ath förstaa  
 huat finnor tekna aa taflit gaa. (vv. 42–45, 49–50, 70–71)

[Then he (= Xerxes) invented this cunning game,/ the chess game, and it was wise. Through this game he teaches, how one should live with honour /.../, how they (=kings, women, laymen and clerks) should act with honour/, which is made clear on the board /.../, they (=the king's councillors) should also henceforth understand, how the chess pieces move on the board.]

Xerxes, or Jacobus, as he is also called, is praised for inventing the game. Human beings are by nature receptive to what is new, and in this case the novelty is a tool of moral and social instruction. The author supports his view with a classical authority: "Aristotelse giffwer os thessa lära/ At naturligt är höra ok lära nymära" (vv. 229–30) ["Aristotle gives us this doctrine that it is natural to hear and learn new things"], a paraphrase of the opening of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "Omnes homines natura scire desiderant."<sup>4</sup>

The author's message is aimed both at individuals and the representative groups in society, and his has an ideological thrust. He wants to teach how the Swedish kingdom should be organised for it to be strong and prosperous. His message is a pressing concern because of the precarious historical situation in Sweden at the time. The kingdom is threatened to the core by internal conflict and external threats. The ultimate responsibility for unrest lies with those at the top of the social hierarchy, especially those upholding positions within the institutional framework of the state. It is these people that are the focus of the author's attention.<sup>5</sup>

## The Crisis: Views on the Government of the Realm

In 15th century Sweden the institutional framework of the state was upheld by the king, the bishops, the nobility and the gentry. The bishops and the nobility recruited the "king's council" (*kungens råd* or *riksrådet*), while both the nobility and gentry recruited the larger assembly called the "council and men of the

<sup>4</sup> Aristoteles, *Metaphysica*. Recensio et translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeka, ed. Gudrun Vuillemin-Diem New York et al. Aristoteles Latinus XXV, 3.2 (Leiden, New York, 1995), I 1.

<sup>5</sup> The two extant manuscripts of *Schacktavelslek* belonged to aristocratic women. *Cod. Holm. D 3* "Fru Elins bok" (National Library, Stockholm), produced in 1487/8, was owned by Elin Gustavsdotter (of the family Sture), widow of the knight Erik Axelsson (of the family Tott), who twice had been "Supervisor of the realm" (*riksföreståndare*). *Codex Askabyensis*" (M 191 folio, Den Arnamagnaeanske Samling. Köpenhamn), produced in 1492, was in the hands of Gunilla Johansdotter (of the family Bese) and written by the guardian of the Askeby abbey. See David Kornhall, *Den fornsvenska sagan om Karl Magnus. Handskrifter och texthistoria* (Lund: GWK Gleemp 1959), 32–80; Patrik Åström, "The Manuscripts of *Skemplan*." *Master Golyas and Sweden. The Transformation of a Clerical Satire*, ed. Olle Ferm and Bridget Morris. *Scripta minora*, 3 (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediaevalia, 1996), 235–56. See also Per Axel Wiktorsson, *Äktenskapsvisan. En lustig visa om samgåendets vedermödor*. *Lectiones* 6 (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediaevalia, 2007), 5–7, 13–15.

realm" (*rikets råd och män*), which was irregularly gathered into diets (*herredagar*), consisting of the officers of state, such as fief holders, reeves and judges of the public courts. Even townspeople and peasants were present at these diets. However, high politics was the foremost concern of the king and his council.<sup>6</sup>

There is no perfect match between the institutions and offices and the pieces on the chessboard, but it is obvious that the author is constantly mindful of them. The exception is the bishops who never enter the game. Nobility and gentry are referred to as *herrskep, herrar* ("lordship, "lords"), *riddare och svenner* ("knights and squires"), and they equate with the "knights", defined as "all those who fight with a sword" (*mz riddarom alla som fäcta mz suärde*). The king's council is referred to simply as "his council" or "the council of the realm", while the rook (*rokkin*) refers to the *marsk* and the *drots*, who are next to the king in rank and the leading representatives of the council. The "council and men of the realm" is described as *mena rikins men* ("the common men of the realm"). *Ollin* is the piece that in Latin was called *alfinus* or *aphiles* (the bishop in modern chess). It signifies the judges (*domare lärde*) in *Schacktavelslek* in their various judicial capacities.

This fabric of institutions and offices is never questioned by the author who undoubtedly considered them a given. What he does scrutinize critically is the bad manners and immoral behavior of those in power, and in so doing engages in the hierarchy of the game and its counterpart in the kingdom.

## The King's Moral Shortcomings

The author laments the fate of the Swedish kings, who are frequently driven into exile. When the king is overthrown and driven away, he loses not only his "power" (*väldet*), that is, his authority over the Swedish realm and the resources attached to his office, but also his honour: "thy drifts opta konungen til skoghen / och mister landh och konungx ära" (vv. 63–64) [therefore the king is often driven into the forest/ and he loses land and the honour of being king]. The underlying issue here is the low morals of kings. The author makes it clear that exile is the final outcome of a king's bad behaviour.

Several sins and vices are highlighted, but the predominant one is greed, a despicable and socially detrimental vice. Contempt for the greedy king is

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<sup>6</sup> The definition of state is in this context broader than what is common in Swedish historiography, but is very close to what Thomas Aquinas claimed. *Principatus*, that is government or governance, is "the holding and exercising of the whole range of authority—and in a broad sense executive—appropriate for securing justice and peace" the main objective of governance and public authority. See John Finnis, *Aquinas. Moral, Political, and Legal Theory*. Founders of Modern Political and Social Thought (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 258. Concerning the Swedish terminology, see Herman Schück, *Rikets råd och män*. Historiska serien, 23 (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 2000), 96–122.

expressed in many ways. He exploits his subjects “without restraint” (*wtan matta*) by sucking the farmers dry in taxation, and depriving his knights of their properties, thus arousing the hatred of his subjects (vv. 911–14, 921–25, 933, 1003–12 et passim).

The author declares that the king “wil ey wara godher” (v. 919) [“does not want to be good”], and that “rätuisonna wäg han ekki finder” (v. 1006) [“he does not find the path of justice”]. There is a philosophical link between these two statements. Thomas Aquinas and others argued that moral goodness on a social level is the will to act according to the demands of justice.<sup>7</sup> This lack of moral goodness is a severe shortcoming. The realm and its subjects suffer from it. Furthermore, it is a sin against God and his creation as the will to moral goodness is every man’s essential aim and duty.

A catalogue of sins and vices or the lack of virtues is readily apparent: Swedish kings yield not only to greed and injustice but also to intemperance, anger (Latin *ira*), mental weariness (Latin *acedia*). To adopt a scholastic term, the Swedish kings lack a developed “moral habitus” which would incline them to act in a morally exemplary fashion, and this affects the country and the people. Thomas Aquinas is unambiguous about this: good rule presupposes moral understanding.<sup>8</sup>

## The Kings Violate National Law

Further accusations are put forward. Not only do the Swedish kings violate Christian norms, but they also violate their royal oath of allegiance, as stipulated in the national law. They should uphold justice and truth, live off ordinary taxes and crown property and they should not deprive their subjects of their property without legal justification, nor should they exploit their peasants by excessive taxation.<sup>9</sup>

The author does not, however, claim openly that revolt against an unjust king is legitimate. This would have been a step too far. What he does say is that a

<sup>7</sup> George Dougherty, *The Moral Basis of Social Order according to Saint Thomas*. Philosophical Studies, 63 (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America, 1941), 5–55; Antoine Verpalen, *Der Begriff des Gemeinwohls bei Thomas von Aquin. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des Personalismus*. Sammlung Politeia, Bd. VI (Heidelberg, 1954), 67–76; Finnis, *Aquinas*, 222–39 (see note 6).

<sup>8</sup> Finnis, *Aquinas*, 232–34 (see note 6).

<sup>9</sup> This oath states e.g. that the king should 1) be a guardian of justice and truth, 2) be true to his people, protect them from violent men, whether of native or foreign origin, and not take anyone’s property except according to the law and legal judgment, 3) live off ordinary taxes and crown property and only impose extra taxes, when extraordinary circumstances dictate. *Magnus Erikssons landslag* (henceforth MEL), ed. Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wessén. Rättshistoriskt bibliotek, 6 (Stockholm: Institutet för Rättshistorisk forskning, 1962), 4–6.

king, who “wil ey wara godher/ tha standa han han ith annat glas til rodher” (vv.919–920) [“does not have the will to be good, will pay for that”], adding that no one should be surprised if people begin to hate an unjust king and rise up against him: “Sa fa the til konung hātiskhet/ ok driffwa honom j fatig ham/ vt af sin landh j fendens nampn” (vv. 926–28) [“They begin to hate the king/ and drive him away to a poor harbour/ out of their land in the name of enmity”].

The right to revolt was much discussed in the middle ages, and political philosophers, including Thomas Aquinas, advocated it as a last resort.<sup>10</sup> In Sweden, revolt, which by the 15th century had had a long history, was legitimized by reference to the national law and the royal oath. When the king broke his oath, his subjects were no longer bound to obey him.<sup>11</sup> The author openly refers to this fact: “thy hānder opte konnwngenom falle/ mot sin edh och moth sin eghin allmoghe” (v. 61–62) [“For it often happens that the king is overthrown because he acts against his oath and his own people”].

### Moral Defects in the King’s Immediate Circle

Not only does the king do wrong, as the author is quick to point out, but the knights, the king’s council, and its most distinguished members and leaders, the “drots” and the “marsk”, are also prone to wrongdoing. Even in the introduction, where the author presents the chess pieces and their counterparts in society, we are told that the leaders not infrequently betray the king whom they ought to serve as best they can: “J blandh them finnas opta falske” (vv. 55–57) [“Among them (=the knights, the “drots”, the “marsk”) are often treacherous ones”].

The reason for their failings is “för giri skuldh och andra begära” (v. 59) [“greed and other desires”]. One such desire, “ambition” (Latin *ambitio*), and the striving for power and social position, is identifiable in the verse: “Ja herre mon the wara alle” (v. 60) [“Indeed, they all want to be lords”]. One effect of this ambition is stated twice in the same context: “thy hānder opte konnwngenom falle” (v. 61) [“It often happens that the king is overthrown”]

<sup>10</sup> David Luscombe, “The State of Nature and the Origin of State.” *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny & Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 768–70; J. H. Burns, ed. *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350–c. 1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 135–36, 142–43, 163, 211–12, 217, 246–48, 326–29, 438–39, 462–64, 493–95.

<sup>11</sup> A distinguished example is St. Birgitta, who referred to both national and divine law when she legitimized a revolt against king Magnus ca. 1360. See Olle Ferm, “La incitazione a rivolta.” *Santa Brigida, Napoli, l’Italia. Atti del convegno di studi italo-svedese*, ed. Olle Ferm, Alessandra Perrioli, and Marcello Rotili (Napoli: Arte Tipografica Editrice, 2009), 11–22.



and that “drifs opta konungen til skoghen” (v. 63) [“the king is often driven into the forest”]. Yet the specific meaning of the phrase (“they all want to be lords”) is ambiguous. Most obviously, it means that the leaders compete to make themselves king.

*Ambitio* is closely allied to *superbia*, pride, as unvirtuous behaviour: not to see one’s place in society but to strive after what is inappropriate is a sign of pride. The author indirectly links pride to greed, however, for pride is made manifest by the absence of humility. In an exemplary tale, the author declares that “gyrughe män äre siellan blydhe” (v. 959) [“greedy men are seldom humble”]. The three vices are thus linked and complement each other.

The king is also accused of bad electoral policies because they contribute to an unhappy order, at least in part. He has elevated “rogues” (“skalkar,” v. 923) as his councillors, and overlooked “knights and squires” (“riddare och svenner,” v. 924). Judging by the context, rogues only exist in the lower echelons of society, which is confirmed elsewhere, where there is comment upon the king’s policy for promotion. The author makes an addition, saying that the unworthy who are promoted are in fact doubly afflicted, being “poor and of illegitimate birth” (“arme och onäcta”), while those who ought to be promoted are characterised by a contrasting wordpair “noble and of legitimate birth” (“the ädla och äkta,” v. 1008). Thus priority of rank combined with true birth and breeding should apply by the latter group’s to prestigious positions. This means, if the verse is taken literally, that not all knights and squires are worthy of high positions.

The king’s ill-fated election policy is repeated *mutatis mutandis* by the knight class in that its representatives try to further their own family interests at the expense of other more worthy candidates. It is especially ill-fated when they promote blood-relatives to judicial posts and bypass those who are better qualified, for social harmony can only be maintained if the law is upheld and justice allowed to prevail (vv. 1741–46, 2155–56).

The “drots” and “marsk”, and the king’s direct representatives, therefore “skula thenna lagh vp halla” (v. 1804) [“should uphold this law” (=the national law)] and have a particular responsibility by punishing “thom som gör illa/ ok them som wilia fridhhin spilla” (vv. 1781–82) [“those who act badly and those who want to destroy peace”]. But unfortunately they neglect their duties by becoming greedy in the exercise of their office, with disastrous effects. When justice is disregarded, discord and conflict arise: “sa wexer thom giri, ok forgaas retwisa/ sa komber ofredh ok omilhet” (vv. 1806–07) [“so they grow greedy and justice will perish, then unrest and harshness will follow”].

## Constitutional Criticism

The author associates a range of unvirtuous qualities and behaviour with the political elite, describing them as unrighteous, greedy, arrogant, dishonest, rebellious and selfish. As with the king, the author has a constitutional basis for his criticism, namely the national law and the oaths of allegiance that the law contains. The broken oaths of the king's council are referred to several times in the introduction (v. 66) and subsequently. Because of the sworn oaths, good counsel is unconditional, in the author's eyes, no matter what attitude the king shows: "j skollen honom rät raada thz är eder edher/ ä huad han waare glader älla wreder" (vv. 1019–20) ["You should advise him correctly, as you have sworn to do, whether he is happy or angry"]. The oath of the king's council was enshrined in the code on kings in the national law, and consisted of three articles: 1) The councillors should give the king useful advice, and be non-partisan and ignore all other considerations, such as patronage on the basis of family or friendship. 2) They should help the king to strengthen the law of the kingdom, so that he upholds his oath and the people uphold theirs. 3) They should guard what the king wishes kept secret, so that nothing is disclosed that might harm the king or the kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

The accusations suggest that the councillors violate the first article of the council's oath in two ways. First, they give the king bad advice, which is detrimental both to the king and the kingdom, and second, they promote family interests when exercising power. In other words, they are disposed to injustice and falsehood, and consequently they are unsuitable for assisting the king in upholding the law of the realm. Thus they also violate the second article. The accusation about falsehood can be linked not only to the third article but to all three articles. Councillors who are dishonest and treacherous cannot be trusted in matters of state.

Several times "oaths" (*eder*) occurs in the plural form, which might be a concession to the demands of meter, since the word rhymes, for example, with "vreder" and "wreder", but it might also refer to two different oaths, those of the king's council and the common oath which the adult population had to swear at the king's accession. As the king's councillors, they did not have the freedom to obtain a dispensation from the common oath, for it applied to all subjects. It was prescribed in the national law, and stated that the subjects of the realm should obey and serve the king, which is hardly the case for a rebel.<sup>13</sup> As indicated above, both the councillors and the subjects in general are accused of being rebellious.

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<sup>12</sup> MEL, 8 (see note 9).

<sup>13</sup> MEL, 6–7 (see note 9).

It may be added that the common oath is explicitly referred to in the oath of the king's council. In the second article it is stated that the king's council shall ensure not only that the king upholds his oath but also that the people uphold theirs. This means that the king's council is given a key position between the king and the people in that it has both a mediating and a controlling function in relation to the king and the people. In fact, the concillors seem to have forgotten this obligation too.

### The Impending Cataclysm: *Anomie*

When the rules are not followed, not only the game, but also the society, ceases to function, and complete chaos ensues. This is the condition that Emile Durkheim called *anomie*, a breakdown of social order due to the dissolution of common norms.<sup>14</sup> Although things have not gone quite so far in Sweden, the effects of bad morals on society are destructive. Lawlessness and disloyalty prevail, and when the oaths that bind one group to another and to the realm are not upheld, the inevitable outcome is social unrest: "Jnghen lagh ok ingen troo/ Jngha eedher ok ingen roo" (vv. 2015–16) ["No law and no allegiance/ no oaths and no rest"].

The author also identifies a lack of rational insight among his fellow citizens. Everything has turned topsy-turvy: injustice has turned to justice, evil acts are seen as good, irrationality is perceived as rationality: "Alth thz han gör illa skall hetha rätt" (v. 1321) ["All wrong he does will be called right"], and "then som mest forradha kan/ Han heter nw een godher man" (vv. 2009–10) ["he who can betray the most, he is now called a good man"]. This kind of foolishness is a poor proverb, according to the author, declaring that unreason is not wisdom but folly: "Then mz ofornofth wil werwa prijs/ Han är galin ok ekki wijs" (vv. 1259–60) ["He who wants to gain glory by unreason/ is foolish and not wise"]. It might be added that "he" in these quotations is used as an impersonal general reference.

Social and moral disorder, closely connected to each other, have disastrous effects. In the long run, a great danger threatens, namely the downfall of the realm. The parallel with the chess game is obvious. Just as the game has its own rules which have to be cleverly used so as not to lose the game, so within the kingdom the rules of reason must be followed to promote good morals and strengthen the rule of law. It is clear from the outset that the game is a fight with an enemy: "ho som thz lära wil/ han skal stadelig tenkia oppa/ hwar hans fiende sta eller ga/ ok tagha sith folk wel til wara" (vv. 243–45) ["he who will learn it (=the game), should always have in mind where his enemy is and take good care of his people"]. The author alludes to Sweden's precarious position

<sup>14</sup> See Ian Craib, *Classical Social Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 31.

within the Scandinavian Union where the policies of the Danish king towards Sweden were a continual provocation and led to armed conflict and internal division. To withstand enemy powers, internal unity is needed. To give expression to his fears, the author refers to Mark 3, 24: "gud han haffwer thz sileffwer sakt/ "thz rike forgaas som haffwer twädraäkt" (vv. 1455–58) ["God himself has said it: 'the realm that is haunted by discord will perish'"].

The author provides tangible historical examples about how bad social morals, the outcome of which is social disorder, can lead to the downfall of even the most powerful nations. The foremost case is the Roman Empire. As long as concord and harmony prevailed, the Romans ruled the world: "the hafdo thz för tera endräkt/ öwer alla wärdena herskap och makth" (vv. 985–86) ["Thanks to their concord/ they ruled over the whole world"]. But once greed was admitted, then discord, hatred and murder followed, and Rome's resources were destroyed. The present-day ruins of Rome still bear witness to this. Yet Rome is not a unique case, and there are many parallels to exemplify greed and its devastating consequences, one of them being Sweden: "ty är wärre/ man finder manga roma like/ sök ikke länger än här i suergis rike" (vv. 998–1000) ["Unfortunately one finds many who are like Rome/. Look no further than here in Sweden"].

The contemporary aristocrats whom the author addresses must surely have seen another parallel. Ruined castles suggest Rome's former greatness and fall, according to the author. Such castles were not specific to Roman history, as would have been known to the recipients of *Schacktavelslek*, for in Sweden there were many ruined or decaying castles and fortresses after the Engelbrekt uprising of the 1430s.

### The Other Side of the Coin: Government for the "Common Good"

Good government can be described in negative terms: circumstances should be the complete the opposite of those that pertain. Nevertheless, *Schacktavelslek* provides some positive fixed points for what the rulers should strive towards.

A strategic concept is the "common good", which is phrased *allmänna bästa* or *mena bästa*, better known in Latin usage as *bonum commune*. Although the concept "common good" is not strictly defined in *Schacktavelslek*, its general meaning is that the community as a whole should be served, which in this case is the realm and its subjects. A closer examination of the context reveals more.

If the rulers have the common good as a guiding principle for their exercise of power, then the general welfare of society will follow, and both rich and poor will benefit, because low desires such as greed and selfishness do not influence the actions of those in power. It was once like this in the Swedish realm:

thz lagdo the alt ther oppa  
 thz mena besta regera saa  
 at almoghen ok rike badha  
 skulle wara j fridh ok nadhe  
 the fikto ey epther rikedom  
 ok ekki epther sin egen froma (vv. 2373–78)

[They gave everything they had/ to rule for the *common good* so/ that both the common people and the wealthy/ would be in a state of peace and grace./They neither hankered after wealth nor their own good.]

To work for the common good means that justice must prevail and that oaths must be observed even if it sometimes means that friendship ties must be set aside: “Thw merk ok thetta mot retwisa/ skalt tw ey swa wenskap prisa/ eller mot retta edher eller menoga besta” (vv. 2849–51) [“Remember also this: you shall not praise friendship over justice or against proper oaths or the common good”].

The common good is contrasted with injustice and partiality, and unvirtuous impulses like greed and selfishness, and their beneficial effects, are described in social terms: social unrest and discord do not occur. Putting it in positive terms, the common good is linked to a defense of the order of justice as codified in the national law, and with a defense of oaths of allegiance. Then things will go well: all is well in the kingdom, which means that “peace and grace” prevail.

The concept of the “common good” comes originally from Greek philosophy. Thomas Aquinas made it his own by substantially elaborating on it and giving it several complementary definitions.<sup>15</sup> The concept is also central to Giles of Rome’s *De regimine principum*, a work that was strongly influenced by Thomas’s thought and in the early 14th paraphrased in Swedish with the title *Konungastýrelsen* (“The Royal Rule”).<sup>16</sup>

At a general level there are similarities between these works and *Schacktavelslek*. Thomas Aquinas argues, for instance, for the importance of the rule of social order, which implies that justice rules and that the different groups of society strive in concord for the common good.<sup>17</sup> In Thomistic thinking, justice has nothing to do with the equal distribution of material

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas comments on the concept in different contexts. Ludwig Schütz, *Thomas-Lexikon* (Stuttgart: sec. ed. 1895, repr. 1958) bonus, col.: 25–26. Thomas Aquinas borrowed the concept from Aristotle, e.g. *Politics*, 1279a, but it is a strategic concept in Plato’s political philosophy, e.g. *Republic*, 506b, 508e.

<sup>16</sup> Lennart Moberg, *Konungastýrelsen. En filologisk undersökning*, Samlingar utgivna av Svenska fornskrift-sällskapet, Bd 69:2 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell 1984), 11–16, 106–107, 219–28. Corinne Peneau, “Um styrilsi konunga ok höfðinga, un miroir inspiré de Gilles de Rome dans la Suède de la première moitié du XIVe siècle,” *Le prince au miroir de la littérature politique de l’Antiquité aux Lumières*, ed. F. Lachaud et L. Scordia (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2007), 191–216.

<sup>17</sup> Dougherty, *Moral Basis*, 35–55 (see note 7).

resources or social rights and obligations. As people are different and therefore contribute in different ways to the common good, it is quite natural that they have different positions in society and that some are more privileged than others.<sup>18</sup> This view is largely in line with the hierarchic perspective on society that we find in *Schacktavelslek* and the other chess allegories.

Although all citizens should contribute to the common good, Giles of Rome emphasized the special obligation of the “partes principales” in this endeavor. The “partes principales” may be identified with representatives of the princely families and members of the nobility and ecclesiastical hierarchy:

Nam sicut sanitas corporis naturalis dependet ex sanitate omnium membrorum et maxime ex sanitate cordis et membrorum principalium, eo quod cor et principalia membra habent influere in alia et rectificare ipsa: sic bonitas regni dependet ex bonitate omnium ciuium; maxime tamen ex iis qui principantur et dominantur in regno.<sup>19</sup>

[Just as the health of the natural body is dependent on the health of all members and especially on the health of the heart and of the principal members, since the heart and the principal members are ordained to influence on and correct the other members: thus the health of the realm is dependent on the health of all members but especially on those who rule and govern the realm.]

In *Schacktavelslek* the concept of the common good is strongly related to power groups (what Giles of Rome called “partes principales”), that is, the king and his councillors, the nobility and, in addition, the court scribes, as servants of power.<sup>20</sup> The peasants are not included, not because they do not contribute to the common good,<sup>21</sup> but because the author is addressing the privileged groups and those in power who must be reminded that they have a special responsibility for the state of the kingdom.

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<sup>18</sup> Justice is in thomistic philosophy based on two principles, one commutative, and the other distributive. Commutative justice is there to guarantee each and every individual certain rights necessary for his or her moral perfection, whilst distributive justice concerns the distribution of rights in proportion to the importance that an individual holds within society.

<sup>19</sup> Egidio Colonna (Aegidius Romanus), *De regimine principum Libri III* (Darmstadt: Scientia Verlag Aalen. Neudruck der Ausgabe Rom 1607, 1967), II, II, 2 (p. 290).

<sup>20</sup> Although these examples of “bonum commune” have their direct or indirect correspondence in Jacobus’s Liber and Meister Stefan’s German version, the link to the idea of “bonum commune” is lacking in these texts, and only exists in *Schacktavelslek*. In other words, they form part of the Swedish author’s additions. The term “bonum commune” is referred to once in Jacobus’s Liber, where the seventh pawn (*Custodes /civitatis/ decet esse sollicitos, oculatos et zelatores boni communis.*) is discussed, although with a different meaning. See Ernst Köpke, *Jacobus de Cessolis*. Mitteilungen aus den Handschriften der Ritter-Akademie zu Brandenburg (Brandenburg, 1879), 27; Ferdinand Vetter, *Das Schachzabelbuch Kunrats von Ammenhausen nebst den Schachbüchern des Jacob von Cessole und des Jacob Mennel*. Bibliothek älterer Schriftwerke der deutschen Schweiz (Frauenfeld: J. Huber, 1892), col., 665–66.

<sup>21</sup> Finnis, *Aquinas*, 234–38 (see note 8).

## Institutional aspects

*Schacktavelslek* lacks a consistent institutional perspective on political government. It preaches morals, but the author alludes in particular to an institutional framework that promotes political decision-making in the service of the common good and explicitly includes the order of succession and the acceptance of new laws.

Concerning the succession, the author outlines four positions (vv. 289–94, 452–74 et passim).

1. Kings should be of royal birth.
2. Kingship inheritance is better than elective kingship.
3. Primogeniture is to be preferred at the succession.
4. A native king is preferable to a foreign king.

His arguments in favour of these positions are closely connected and sometimes almost identical. A central premise is that conflict must be avoided. Conflicts commonly occur at the election of king, and many promote their own candidates for selfish ends and without consideration of the common good. Even if the choice is restricted to those of royal blood, it might occur that several candidates are presented. For this reason primogeniture should be observed in a line of succession. Moreover, the future king can be prepared as best possible for his future role. He will receive a sound upbringing, especially if his parents are good. In addition, his subjects will get accustomed to him and be more inclined to show allegiance to a candidate whom they know and who has been shaped for his future task. For this reason a king should not be brought in from another country.

But the pleading for a native king can also be seen against the background of political events in Sweden and the country's harsh experience with foreign rulers. Sweden had not seen a native-born king for 100 years, with the exception of the years 1448–1457 when the Swedish nobleman Karl Knutsson (Bonde) was king, although his regime did not bring good fortune either. Much of the criticism of the king in *Schacktavelslek* seems to be directed at Karl Knutsson in particular. He was driven into exile in 1457, but returned twice in the 1460s.<sup>22</sup> The author declares that exiled kings sometimes return which is to no avail if he is "worthless" (*usel*). He will not alter his behaviour but carry on as before: "jak radher allom se for sik/ som han giorde för, saa gör han tik" (vv. 2013–14) ["I advise everyone to be on the alert: as he has done in the past, he will do to you"]. Clearly, Karl Knutsson lacked something that the author thought essential: an upbringing within a royal family and an adequate

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<sup>22</sup> Blomqvist, *Schacktavelslek*, 111–29.

preparation for office. In respect of this, the author confronts an obvious dilemma, for no-one could provide for such preparation in Sweden at that time.

When pleading for hereditary kingship the author of *Schacktavelslek* argues against constitutional tradition in Sweden. The old regional laws and the national laws of Magnus Eriksson and Christopher of Bavaria defined Sweden as an elective monarchy, and the author would of course have been well aware of this. Therefore, his opinion must have been based on other sources, but a specific source is hard to find. It might be *Konungastyrelsen* ("The Royal rule") whose author is in favour of hereditary kingship. Election procedures might cause devastating effects, it is argued, because electors might try to favour their own relatives. However, they disagree in other respects.<sup>23</sup>

The king is the highest protector of justice, as codified in the national law, and this is repeatedly stated in the text. Since the king cannot uphold justice by himself, he is supported in his task of upholding the law by the "drots" and "marsk" and by the judges. In this task they judges must follow the law and they may not introduce new laws or customs (*seder*), if the nation as a whole does not request it. This position is underlined by a well-known legal-philosophical maxim: "thy thz skal them allom röra/ thz skule ok alle samtykka ok höra (vv. 1789–90) ["For that which concerns everyone,/ shall also be agreed upon by everyone"]. The formulation is better known in Latin: *Quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus debet approbari*, which originates in Roman law.<sup>24</sup>

The process of making new laws is a common concern, according to the quotation. In this case, the inhabitants of the kingdom should propose new laws, and that the king and the "common council of the realm" affirm the legal proposals made by his subjects: "tha skal thz ske medh konungx nadh/ ok alt hans mena rikins raad" (vv. 1785–86) ["Then it shall occur by the grace of the king, and all the common council of the realm"]. This is very much in accordance with king Christoffer's promulgation of the common law of the kingdom in 1442.

The concept of the "common council of the realm" does not refer to the "king's council" but to the larger political grouping which in the fifteenth-century diplomas is referred to as the "council and men of the realm" (*rikets råd och män*). The author does not unambiguously claim that they should only have an affirmative role in the legal process. It is certainly within this group that proposals for new laws should be made. As indicated above, this group consisted of about one hundred noblemen with authority to represent the inhabitants of realm, and they were resident in different parts of the

<sup>23</sup> Robert Geete, *Um styrlsi kununga ok höfthinga. Normaliserad upplaga* (Stockholm: Nordstedt, 1878), 10–12; Olle Ferm, "Schacktavelslek. An International Bestseller", 312–13 (see note 2).

<sup>24</sup> *Corpus Iuris Civilis II*, ed. Paulus Krüger (Berlin: Weidmann, 1959), Codex 5.59.5.2. See also Stig Strömholm, "Quod omnes tangit en rättsprincips väg till Sverige." *De lege. Eftersyn och eftertanke*, ed. Petter Asp (Uppsala: Iustus Förlag, 2007), 295–304.



kingdom where they were periodically called to political meetings, “diets” (*dagar, herredagar*).

This reference to the greater assembly fits with the author’s warning against government by a few influential advisers. Oligarchy should be avoided, and consequently the author advocates considering advice from several people whose different viewpoints can be weighed up against each other, thus avoiding the council of a few dominant and strong-minded people, who “drunkna stundom j sinom wisdom” (v. 1800) [“sometimes drown in their own wisdom”.]

In short, the ideal form of government is what political philosophers called *regimen politicum*, when the ruler has, according to Thomas Aquinas, *potestatem coarctatam secundum leges aliquas leges civitatis* [“power, which is limited by certain laws of the state”].<sup>25</sup> This might be called constitutional government. In the *Schacktavelslek*, it means that political rule must be based on national law and national political institutions, and that *regimen regale*, i.e. royal autocracy, when the ruler has what Thomas Aquinas calls “plenary power” (*potestas plenaria*), is rejected.<sup>26</sup> The constitutional line had been advocated in Swedish quarters against the Danish Union kings since the beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

## Remedy: Moral Education

Schacktavelslek does not claim to be a political tract, nor is it one. Although there are elements to suggest that some institutions are preferable to others, the central theme is social morality and the education towards virtues and away from vices, in a social perspective. If only low desires, which promote vice, can be kept in check, then interaction between people will be improved and in the long run the community as a whole will benefit. This opinion is not specific to *Schacktavelslek*; Thomas Aquinas and other philosophers thought of social relations as moral relations.<sup>28</sup>

“Moral virtue” (*virtus moralis*) is the ideal. In medieval discourse it is not given by nature but must be learned and made to become a part of the

<sup>25</sup> S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Sententia Libri Politicorum. Opera omnia* 4. Curante Roberto Busa (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980), I. I n.5.

<sup>26</sup> S. Thomae Aquinatis I. I n. 5. 7 (see note 25). See David Luscombe, “The State of Nature and the Origin of State,” *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 765–66 and Finnis, *Aquinas*, 258–66 (see note 8).

<sup>27</sup> Erik Lönnroth, “Sverige och Kalmarunionen 1434–1457,” Ph.D. diss., Göteborg University, 1934, analysed the ideological conflict in late medieval Sweden by means of these concepts: the Swedes argued in favour of *regimen politicum* and the Danish Union monarch was the proponent of *regimen regale*.

<sup>28</sup> Dougherty, *Moral Basis*, 22 (see note 7) and Finnis, *Aquinas*, 226–30 (see note 8).

personality, one's *habitus*, and it can be achieved by practice or in the repetition of good deeds.<sup>29</sup> In *Schacktavelslek* this view is well expressed by the generous use of exempla and didactic stories which exemplify good behaviour in different situations. However, since all situations cannot be foreseen and illustrated with examples, moral behaviour has presupposed a reasoned insight about what is morally good. This insight is supported by two faculties, one theoretical, *sapientia*, and one practical, *prudentia*.<sup>30</sup> *Schacktavelslek* discusses what it is to be "wise" (*vis*) and "clever/ prudent" (*klok*), that is, *sapiens* and *prudens* respectively. However, a clear distinction between the two terms cannot be made, and the author sometimes also refers to the term *snille* which can mean both "wisdom" and "cleverness" and "reason". The emphasis, judging by the context, is on *prudentia*,<sup>31</sup> which implies that a person by rational reasoning can perform the correct action in a given situation. If reason plays an important part for virtuous deeds, the same is true for the will, for without a firm desire for moral virtue good is not achieved.

The basis of a moral *habitus*, the developed ability to make moral choices and act in accordance with them, is established in childhood through a good upbringing. Great responsibility therefore falls on parents: "ther haffua förälra optha skuldh/ Ath barnen äro odygda full" (vv. 1295–96) ["often it is the fault of the parents that children are full of mischief"]. Although upbringing evidently is a shared responsibility, gender plays a distinctive role. Judging by what is said about the queen, the woman is set a special task: she is in charge of the moral education of her children, and should bring them up lovingly, so that "swa at the lära tokt ok snille" (v. 489) ["they learn morality and wisdom"]. The king should also get a formal education: if he does not learn *dygd ok konster* ("virtue and arts") people will consider him stupid, *ena asnakrono werdh* (v. 852) ["worthy of the crown of an ass"].

For the knight class an educational programme is outlined, which includes specified formal studies (the basics of *artes* studies), which indisputably promote a disposition to be prudent in battle and combat and in office to strengthen the rule of law (vv. 1277–82). Perhaps the author is naïve (at least by our modern standards) about the salutary moral outcome of formal studies, but this is an appeal to his audience, the nobility, to improve in learning so as to be better able to perform their official duties as judges or as the king's councillors.

It takes time to become wise and prudent. Therefore, young upstarts must not be given free hand, and older, wise men should lead them: "thy bör wisom

<sup>29</sup> *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 3 Hrsg. Joachim Ritter (Basel: Schwabe & Co, 1974), col., 1120–1123 [*Hexis (habitus)*].

<sup>30</sup> Finnis, *Aquinas*, 119 et passim (see note 8).

<sup>31</sup> Vv. 6, 43, 73, 141, 143, 282, 363, 390, 489, 506, 1260, 1280, 1325, 1327, 1800 et passim.

regera thz spiill" (vv. 1261–66) ["Therefore the wise should govern the game"]. This phrase seems to be inspired by Aristotle's much-quoted dictum: *Sapientis est ordinare* ["The wise man knows how to keep things in order"]. Thomas Aquinas refers to it in the first chapter of *Summa contra Gentiles*, the title of which is: *Quod sit officium sapientis* ["The task of the wise man"].<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, the author of *Schacktavelselek* suggests that the opposite is the case in his day. Even twelve-year old boys want to marry and receive fiefs from the Crown; and thus it is particularly unfortunate if a very young boy is elected king, since he lacks the wisdom and knowledge necessary for good rule and government (vv.1284–94, 1312).

But, in the end, no one will ever reach moral perfection. Therefore the desire for virtue should last a lifetime. This point is made when the author develops his views on the duties of the queen, whose role is not only to nurture her children but also to mollify the king's anger and teach those in her household—men as well as women—good morals and wisdom (vv. 479–89). The queen as chess piece of course stands for women in general as the author explicitly declares in his introduction. This means that the author has in mind not only the queen and the royal court but also married women at aristocratic manor-houses.

## Conclusion

The message of *Schacktavelselek* is aimed at the aristocracy, the group that bears the greatest responsibility for the wretched situation in which Sweden finds herself. The emphasis placed on the exemplary moral role of the social elite indicates a Platonic perspective in the work. However, the author's moral appeal is also influenced overall by a rational code of virtue along Aristotelean-Thomist lines, as well as by the national law and a feudal code of conduct. The Bible – significantly – is cited only rarely. Politically, the author makes a case for national kingship and constitutional government, and in so doing he is probably inspired by *Konungastyrelsen* ("The Royal rule", a Swedish reworking of Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum*). In particular, he takes a position against the autocratic rule of the Danish regents and the Swedish king, Karl Knutsson, who were the cause of many conflicts in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. He is troubled by the growing political and social instability that he sees as a threat to the very survival of Sweden. His concern comes not only from the gradual

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<sup>32</sup> Aristoteles, *Metaphysica*. Recensio et translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeka, ed. Gudrun Vuillemin-Diem. Aristoteles Latinus, XXV 3.2 (New York and Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995). I 2. S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra Gentiles, Opera omnia*, 2. Curante Roberto Busa (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog 1980): I, cp.1, n.2.

breakdown of social patterns internally, but also from the desire for political hegemony among the Danish regents of the Nordic Union. Calamity can only be avoided if both politicians and citizens mobilize around core principles. They must recognize "the common good" which brings about peace and justice and is achievable if they withstand the common vices of greed, pride, disloyalty, and nepotism.

## Chapter 3

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### *Ludus Scaccarii*: Games and Governance in Twelfth-Century England

History cannot be well read as a chess problem, and the man who tries to read it so is not worthy to read it at all. Its scenes cannot be realized, its lessons cannot be learned, if the actors are looked on merely as puppets.<sup>1</sup>

While Bishop Stubbs, one of the preeminent nineteenth-century historians of medieval England, is undoubtedly correct that history is not a chess problem with a clearly defined resolution, he is wrong to dismiss chess as a useful heuristic tool for analyzing medieval society.<sup>2</sup> But he is not the only historian to overlook the value of studying one of the most popular activities and most important and malleable metaphors of the Middle Ages. This is true even when a medieval author explicitly compares social and political interaction to the game of chess, as Richard fitz Neal does in his *Dialogus de Scaccario* or “Dialogue

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<sup>1</sup> William Stubbs, introduction to *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1867), 2: vii. I first became aware of Stubbs’ comparison of chess and history while reading Robert Brentano, “The Sound of Stubbs,” *Journal of British Studies* 6.2 (1967): 1–14; here 7.

<sup>2</sup> I would like to thank a number of people who have commented on earlier drafts of this essay. First and foremost, I would like to thank my former adviser, Paul R. Hyams, for cultivating my interest in both games and state formation by introducing me to this fascinating text. I also want to thank him for helping me to develop and focus my arguments by reading several earlier drafts of this essay while I was in graduate school. I would also like to thank the audiences at the Cornell Medieval Studies Colloquium, where I presented my initial observations in March 2002, and the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, where I read a version of the present essay in September 2008. I also want to thank the students in my courses on medieval games at Cornell and the University of Arizona for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this essay. Any errors or omissions remain my own. Finally, I want to dedicate this essay to the memory of my father-in-law, Thomas R. Burns, with whom I played so many enjoyable games of chess over the years.

of the Exchequer.”<sup>3</sup> Historians of both chess and medieval administration have either ignored or glossed over this key passage in Richard’s text. H. J. R. Murray, whose seminal *A History of Chess* remains the classic reference work on the subject, was not particularly interested in the Dialogue, because it reveals nothing about how the game was played.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, historians of medieval administration appear to have little knowledge of the important status chess had in the Middle Ages, and so have paid little attention to what insights the game can provide about the structures and processes of medieval governance.<sup>5</sup> R. L. Poole, whose *The Exchequer in the Twelfth Century* is still the definitive work on the subject, dismisses Richard’s chess analogy as “a simple play upon words, of a type very common among medieval writers, and not to be taken seriously.”<sup>6</sup> Instead, he employs the mechanistic imagery that has pervaded twentieth-century scholarship on medieval administration.<sup>7</sup> By dismissing the Dialogue’s chess analogy, however, Poole has turned Richard into the very puppet that Stubbs warned against—a cog in an administrative machine.

Although most other historians have not been as explicit as Poole about comparing the Exchequer to a machine, phrases like “administrative machine”

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<sup>3</sup> I have used Emilie Amt’s newly edited and translated text in *Dialogus de Scaccario and Constitutio Domus Regis: The Dialogue of the Exchequer and The Establishment of the Royal Household*, ed. and trans. Emilie Amt and S. D. Church. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). Another widely available translation is Richard Fitz Nigel, *Dialogus de Scaccario: The Course of the Exchequer*, ed. and trans. Charles Johnson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). Ernest F. Henderson’s translation in *Select Historical Documents of the Middle Ages* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896) is also available online: <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/medieval/excheq.asp> (last accessed March 15, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Murray devotes less than a page of his 900-page opus to the Dialogue. H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Chess* (1913; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 419.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Homer Haskins draws attention to this comparison between chess and the Exchequer in his “Latin Literature of Sport,” *Speculum* 2.3 (1927), 235–52; here 250–51, but he does not explore the possibilities that such a comparison presents for furthering our understanding of medieval administration. Peter Haidu also takes note of this comparison, but he argues that Richard is being deceptive in making such a comparison: “The extended metaphor or allegory to chess designates as noble play the most serious, grubby business of governance outside of warfare.” *Subject Medieval/Modern: Text and Governance in the Middle Ages*. *Figurae* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004), 185. The one scholar who does take Richard’s chess analogy seriously is Hubert Hall, who describes “the game of the Exchequer” in his *Introduction to the Study of the Pipe Rolls* (London: Wyman and Sons, 1884), 40–42. Hall also titled one of the chapters of a later book on the Exchequer “The Chess-Game” in *The Antiquities and Curiosities of the Exchequer* (London: Eliot Stock, 1891), 114–34. While it is admirable for Hall not to discount this imagery, his comparisons are rather facile, because he appears to know very little about the medieval game.

<sup>6</sup> Reginald L. Poole, *The Exchequer in the Twelfth Century* (1912; London: Frank Cass, 1973), 100. One of the Latin words for chess and the chessboard is the same as the word for the Exchequer—*scaccarium*.

<sup>7</sup> Poole explains: “I have considered the Exchequer a machine at work and have tried to explain how it worked” (*The Exchequer*, vi [see note 6]).

or the “machinery of government” are common in discussions of twelfth-century English governance.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Michael Clanchy has gone so far as to read into the twelfth-century Exchequer Max Weber’s “bureaucratic machine.”<sup>9</sup> But why is this? No one in the twelfth century employed this mechanistic imagery. Richard’s contemporary, John of Salisbury, used an organic metaphor—the body politic—in his *Policraticus*.<sup>10</sup> In fact, it was not until the automata of the early modern period and the technological wonders of the Industrial Revolution that people started comparing governance to machines.<sup>11</sup> The other essays in this volume demonstrate the central im-

<sup>8</sup> The examples are too numerous to cite, but most of the leading authorities on twelfth-century English administration have used one of these phrases. For examples, see Ralph V. Turner, *Men Raised from the Dust: Administrative Service and Upward Mobility in Angevin England*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 11; H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles, *The Governance of Mediaeval England from the Conquest to Magna Carta*. Edinburgh University Publications; History, Philosophy and Economics, 16 (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1963), 159; C. Warren Hollister does put “machine” in quotation marks when referring to Richardson and Sales’ use of this term, making him one of the few historians to demonstrate an awareness that this term is not appropriate for the Middle Ages. See C. Warren Hollister, *Henry I*, ed. and completed by Amanda Clark Frost. Yale English Monarchs (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>9</sup> “The Exchequer conforms with Weber’s description of bureaucratic and modern corporate action. Unlike the Domesday survey, the Exchequer set up an administrative machine, multiplying year on year, which pursued named individuals through written instruments (tally sticks, writs, pipe rolls etc.). The ‘Dialogue of the Exchequer’ explains, purportedly through dialectic, the ‘hidden mysteries of the Exchequer.’ In other words, it explains how charisma became routinized,” Michael Clanchy, “Does Writing Construct the State?” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 15 (2002), 68–70; here 69. Clanchy previously presented these ideas in *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 66.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the development of this metaphor in ancient and early medieval literature as well as John of Salisbury’s use of this imagery, see Tilman Struve, “The Importance of the Organism in the Political Theory of John of Salisbury,” *The World of John of Salisbury*, ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 303–17; Cary J. Nederman, “The Physiological Significance of the Organic Metaphor in John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus*,” *History of Political Thought* 8 (1987), 211–23. Most of the *Policraticus* has been translated. Books I–III and sections from books VII and VIII have been translated by Joseph B. Pike as *Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press / London: Oxford University Press, 1938). Books IV–VI and selections from books VII and VIII have been translated by John Dickinson as *The Statesman’s Book of John of Salisbury* (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1927). See also Jenny Adams, “Medieval Chess, Perceval’s Education, and a Dialectic of Misogyny” in this volume.

<sup>11</sup> See Otto Mayr, “The Clockwork State,” *Authority, Liberty and Automatic Machinery in Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 102–14. For more on this metaphor, see also Dietmar Peil, *Untersuchungen zur Staats- und Herrschaftsmetaphorik in literarischen Zeugnissen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*. Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, Bd. 50 (München: Fink, 1983), 489–595. Sociologist Reinhard Bendix also makes this point: “Bureaucracy in the modern state tends to operate like an ‘automaton,’ i.e., a body of officials whose performance of duty is professionalized and has consequently become independent of their sentiments and opinions,” “Bureaucracy and the Problem of Power,”

portance of chess in helping us to understand medieval culture as reflected in works of literature. Why should this same imagery be dismissed when it appears in an administrative manual?

Gaming imagery, in fact, appears in two of the most important ancient works on governance: Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*. Both philosophers employed the board game of *polis* as a metaphor to explain political interactions.<sup>12</sup> Aristotle compared a man without a polis to an isolated (and therefore defenseless) piece in the game of *polis* in order to help elucidate his famous argument that man is a political animal.<sup>13</sup> Plato has Socrates use the imagery of this game to help explain the complicated political landscape of city-states.<sup>14</sup> Incidentally, Richard (in the voice of his fictional disciple) dismissed both philosophers, because of what he perceived as the artfulness of his contemporaries, who used classical learning to obfuscate rather than educate.<sup>15</sup> Yet, the fact that Richard was unaware of the ancient lineage of using gaming metaphors to help explicate complex concepts does not mean that we should discount his chess analogy.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, Richard's dismissal of the ancients does demonstrate an important aspect of his work, which sets him apart from many other contributors to the Twelfth-Century Renaissance—Richard was self-consciously and proudly a

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*Public Administration Review* 5 (1945), 194–209; reprinted in *Max Weber: Critical Responses—Volume II: Methods and Theory*, ed. Bryan S. Turner (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 158. Whatever medieval administration was, it was certainly not this.

<sup>12</sup> For comments on the game of polis, see Mogens Herman Hansen, "The Game Called Polis," *Even More Studies in the Ancient Greek Polis*, ed. Thomas Heine Nielsen. Papers from the Copenhagen Polis Centre, 6. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002), 9–15. For discussion of this and other Greek board games, see R. G. Austin, "Greek Board-Games," *Antiquity* 14 (1940), 257–71. Finally, see Leslie Kurke's excellent analysis of polis in *Coins, Bodies, Games, and Gold: The Politics of Meaning in Archaic Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 247–98.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Pol.* 1253a1–7.

<sup>14</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 422e. Richard also mentions in passing (and without credit) the ancient philosopher's "ship of state" metaphor when talking about the "shipwrecked state of the kingdom" (*naufragum regni statum*) after Henry's disputes with his wife and sons (Amt, *Dialogus*, 116).

<sup>15</sup> "Those who like novelties," he answered, 'and who want to chase after subtle distinctions, have Aristotle and Plato to listen to. You are going to write about useful things, not subtle ones' (Et ille, "Qui nouitatibus gaudent, qui subtilium rerum fugam appetunt, habent Aristotilem et libros Platonicos, audiant illos. Tu scribe non subtilia set utilia") Amt, *Dialogus*, 8–9 (see note 3).

<sup>16</sup> Even if Richard had admired Plato and Aristotle, he would not have been able to read these two works. Aristotle's *Politics* was not translated into Latin until the thirteenth century, while Plato's *Republic* was not translated into Latin until the fifteenth century. William A. Wallace, "Aristotle in the Middle Ages," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982), 1: 456–69; James Hankins, "Plato in the Middle Ages," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987), 9: 694–704, reprinted in James Hankins, *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance*. *Storia e letteratura*, 215 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2004), 2: 7–26.



traditionalist and not a “modern.”<sup>17</sup> One of the main reasons for this is that the development of the Exchequer in the twelfth century was in large part due to the labors of his family. As John Hudson has shown, in addition to being an administrative manual, the *Dialogue* is also a history of the family which played a central role in twelfth-century English administration.<sup>18</sup> Richard fitz Neal (ca. 1130–1198), Henry II’s treasurer and bishop of London, was the illegitimate son of Bishop Nigel of Ely (d. 1169), who also served as Henry II’s treasurer.<sup>19</sup> Nigel was the nephew of Bishop Roger of Salisbury (ca. 1065–1139), the most important of Henry I’s administrators, who “inaugurated the exchequer system, centralized royal justice, created a trained bureaucracy, and still found time to govern his own large diocese and be an active patron of art, education, and literature.”<sup>20</sup> In 1158, Richard became the third member of this family to administer the Exchequer, when his father bought the office of treasurer for him for 400 pounds.<sup>21</sup> Two decades into office, Richard composed what is regarded as the first administrative manual of medieval Europe—the *Dialogue of the Exchequer*.<sup>22</sup>

This text outlines and explains the working of the Exchequer, which accounted for royal revenues by twice a year auditing the sheriffs, who were the royal agents charged with collecting this income from the counties. Richard would no doubt be horrified at such a simple description of the complex activities of the Exchequer, but in the interest of helping the reader understand why he compared the interaction between himself and the sheriffs to a game of chess, a brief account of what took place at the Exchequer would be useful. In the

<sup>17</sup> For more on reactions against the “subtlety of the moderns,” see Michael Clanchy, “*Moderni* in Education and Government in England,” *Speculum* 50.4 (1975), 671–88.

<sup>18</sup> John Hudson, “Administration, Family and Perceptions of the Past in Late Twelfth-Century England: Richard FitzNigel and the *Dialogue of the Exchequer*,” *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Paul Magdalino (London: Hambledon, 1992), 74–98. For Richard’s assessment of the achievements of his father and great-uncle, see Amt, *Dialogus*, 64–67, 76–77, 88–91 (see note 3).

<sup>19</sup> Biographical information is taken from Hudson, “Administration” (see note 18); Johnson, *Dialogus de Scaccario*, xiv–xx (see note 3); Amt, *Dialogus*, xiv–xviii (see note 3); H. G. Richardson, “Richard Fitz Neal and the *Dialogus de Scaccario*,” *English Historical Review* 43 (1928), 161–71 and 321–40.

<sup>20</sup> Edward J. Kealey, *Roger of Salisbury: Viceroy of England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Over the years he also held a number of other ecclesiastical offices, including archdeacon of Ely, canon of St Paul’s, archdeacon of Colchester, dean of Lincoln, and finally bishop of London—from December 1189 (Johnson, *Dialogus de Scaccario*, xv, and Amt, *Dialogus*, xvi [see note 3 for each]).

<sup>22</sup> There has been some debate over the exact years of writing. Emilie Amt, the most recent editor of the text, concludes that “the *Dialogus*, begun in 1177, was written over the course of several years. The author then went back over his text, revising and perhaps finishing it, on at least one occasion in the mid-1180s or later. We do not know when he finally laid it aside” (*Dialogus*, xx [see note 3]).

spring, at Easter, the sheriff accounted for part of the amount owed. He was then given a receipt in the form of a tally, which was a scored stick. The notches of different sizes represented different amounts—shillings, pounds, scores of pounds, etc.<sup>23</sup> This stick was then split along its length, so that both halves recorded the notches. Half was given to the sheriff, while the Exchequer held the other half, so that both would have a record of the transaction. When the sheriff returned at Michaelmas, in the fall, he paid the amount he had collected since Easter, and he presented his tally and any documents proving exemptions from the required sums. The sheriff then took his place at the table.<sup>24</sup> Richard (the treasurer) did not actually sit directly across from his opponent (the sheriff), as one would in a game of chess. Instead, this place was held by the chief justiciar, because as Richard explains, he was “first in the realm after the king” [*primus post regem in regno*].<sup>25</sup> This would seem to pose a problem with Richard’s chess analogy; but Richard makes it clear later in the text that the treasurer is the sheriff’s adversary by reason of his office.<sup>26</sup> Another more serious problem is that the “game” that was played on the Exchequer table bears little resemblance to chess. Counters representing the amount the sheriff owed were placed at the top of the table. Then, counters for what he had paid at Easter, any exemptions, and the amount paid at Michaelmas were placed at the bottom of the table. These amounts were compared and the results recorded in the Pipe Rolls.<sup>27</sup>

The comparison that Richard makes in his prologue between this game and chess appears to be tenuous at best.<sup>28</sup> To make matters worse, he does not fully develop this imagery throughout his text. It is easy to see why so many scholars of this document have ignored this reference. But, upon closer examination, there is more to this comparison than is first apparent. The following essay will argue that the placement of this metaphor at the beginning of the work suggests that Richard wanted his readers to think about the Exchequer as a game, keeping the imagery of a chess match in mind as he described both the structures and processes of the Exchequer. A critical reexamination of the Dialogue in light of what we know about the ways in which chess was played and its reputation and image in late twelfth-century England can provide

<sup>23</sup> Richard describes this process in detail (Amt, *Dialogus*, 32–37). For pictures of medieval tally sticks, see the UK National Archives’ website: [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/museum/item.asp?item\\_id=6](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/museum/item.asp?item_id=6) (last accessed March 15, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> For a late medieval drawing and description of the audit at the Exchequer, see the UK National Archives’ website: [http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/museum/item.asp?item\\_id=5](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/museum/item.asp?item_id=5) (last accessed March 15, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Amt, *Dialogus*, 20–23 (see note 3).

<sup>26</sup> “...ratione officii sibi uidetur aduersari...” (Amt, *Dialogus*, 126 [see note 3]); see note 87.

<sup>27</sup> For a brief description of these records, see the UK National Archives’ website: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/rdleaflet.asp?sLeafletID=186> (last accessed March 15, 2011). For an analysis of these documents, see Hall, *Introduction* (see note 5).

<sup>28</sup> Amt, *Dialogus*, 10–11 (see note 3). See below for the quotation.

additional insights into how this process of royal administration functioned. The first question that must be answered is why Richard would want people to conceptualize the Exchequer as a game.

It is not just the chessboard (*scaccarium*) with which the Exchequer shares its name that portrays a gaming mentality in the text. The activities of the Exchequer itself exhibit the attributes of a game: rules, rituals, penalties, time limits, spatial boundaries, descriptions of venue, judges, spectators, etc.<sup>29</sup> In the portrayal of the duties of the officers of the Exchequer, the descriptions of the forms and how they are filled out, laws, procedures, and all of the other mundane activities of bureaucracy there persists the language and vocabulary of games. Even the frame story of the Dialogue itself exhibits elements of a game. In fact, it seems curious that Richard would have chosen to write a dialogue. Why did he not just list the officers and their duties? This would seem to make more sense if his only purpose was to describe the mechanical operations of the Exchequer. Why does he employ this circuitous method of skipping around from topic to topic at the request of his fictional disciple? Why complicate the text by inventing a frame story? Although this was a common didactic tool, the answer to these questions might be that he wants to continually remind the reader of the gaming imagery he set out at the beginning of his text. He wants to remind the reader that all of his descriptions of forms and duties should be thought of as rules for a game. Knowledge of them is a necessity for a player, but rules are not everything. Rules are merely guidelines that attempt to make the game fair. As with chess, knowing how the pieces move does not tell you how to play the game well. This can only be learned by playing the game with an experienced player.<sup>30</sup> That is why Richard's pedagogical exposition consists of an element of competition in the interplay between the fictional master and disciple, as the disciple constantly spurs the master on, while the master occasionally evades his disciple's questions or congratulates him on his perceptiveness. The structure of the

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<sup>29</sup> Space does not permit an extended treatment of theories of play and games, but the seminal study on this topic is Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Human Culture*. International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction (London: Routledge, 1949); for an overview of reactions to his theories, see Robert Anchor, "History and Play: Huizinga and His Critics," *History and Theory* 17 (1978), 63–93; see also Roger Cailliois's response to Huizinga's theories in *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961); for the relationship between literature and games, see R. Rawdon Wilson, *In Palamedes' Shadow: Explorations in Play, Game, and Narrative Theory* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990); finally Clifford Geertz's "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight," rpt. in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 412–53, remains one of the best and most cited theoretical discussions of the topic.

<sup>30</sup> In some of the early didactic literature, it is sometimes very difficult even to determine how the pieces move and how they are supposed to be set up. For examples of this literature, see Murray, *A History of Chess*, 496–528 (see note 4).

dialogue itself is presented as an orderly competition in which each player takes a turn. The master in the Dialogue even makes this explicit when at one point he tells his disciple: “‘*Ad aleam resides.*’”<sup>31</sup> Yet, the genre of the dialogue, like the rules of a game, merely provides a structure. The order imposed by this structure should not be mistaken for the process of playing. As with chess, the Exchequer is more than its rules—it is the process of interaction between the players (the treasurer and sheriffs) that takes place within the context of these rules.<sup>32</sup>

Approaching the Exchequer with a gaming mentality need not demean the activity the Dialogue describes. Just as royal administration is a serious matter, so too can games be treated very seriously. There are numerous examples from medieval literature illustrating this view of games. The many instances in which chess is linked with violence show that this game was not always regarded as just a pleasant pastime.<sup>33</sup> Chess could be a serious pursuit in which emotions ran high and tempers flared. Within a certain context—with honor, money, or even one’s life on the line—it was not a game that people took lightly.<sup>34</sup> The same can be said about both being audited and conducting an

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<sup>31</sup> Amt, *Dialogus*, 38 (see note 3).

<sup>32</sup> Jens T. Wollesen correctly points out that “even though the moves of the pieces are constrained by certain rules, their actions are not entirely predetermined.” “*Sub specie ludi...*Text and Images in Alfonso El Sabio’s *Libros de Acedrex, Dados e Tablas*,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 53 (1990), 288. See Kristen Juel, “Defeating the Devil at Chess: A Struggle between Virtue and Vice in *Le Jeu des Esches de la dame moralisé*” in this volume.

<sup>33</sup> There are numerous examples in medieval literature of chess being associated with violence in a variety of contexts. For some examples of the chess pieces and boards being used as weapons, see *The History of Fulk Fitz-Warine*, trans. Alice Kemp-Welch (London: A. Moring, 1904), 42; Chrétien de Troyes, “The Story of the Grail,” *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, trans. David Stained (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 412; and Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. A. T. Hatto (New York: Penguin, 1980), 209–10. For more on chess in German literature, including its violent applications, see Albrecht Classen, “Chess in Medieval German Literature: A Mirror of Social-Historical and Cultural, Religious, Ethical, and Moral Conditions” in this volume. For additional examples of chess and violence, including more stories in which the materials of the game serve as weapons, see Frederick Madden, “Historical Remarks on the Introduction of Chess into Europe,” *Chess Player’s Chronicle* 1 (1841), 126–27, but ignore the “historical remarks,” most of which are outdated. See also the discussions of Walter Map and Alexander Neckam below as well as the story about King Canute in note 68. In medieval literature, chess matches also sometimes immediately precede or follow an act of brutality. For example, soon after setting the conflagration that killed all the inhabitants of the town of Origny, including 100 nuns praying in a church (and during Lent no less!), Raoul de Cambrai plays a game of chess. *Raoul de Cambrai*, ed. and trans. Sarah Kay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 101. Fulk Fitz-Warine also decapitates the opponents his companions had just failed to defeat at chess (*The History of Fulk Fitz-Warine*, 85).

<sup>34</sup> Gambling was common in medieval chess (Murray, *A History of Chess*, 474–75). For a nearly contemporary example of the combination of gambling for a stake and playing for one’s life, see *Huon of Bordeaux*, trans. John Bouchier and Robert Steele (London: George Allen, 1895), 200–03.

audit at the Exchequer. It is, therefore, also possible to see the activities of the Exchequer in light of a gaming mentality, and in the process examine the human elements of what is too often mistaken for impersonal bureaucracy.

In order to appreciate Richard's chess analogy and to explore its deeper implications, it is first necessary to briefly describe the position of chess in twelfth-century England. The other essays in this collection admirably analyze the role of chess at other times and in other places in medieval Europe, so I will try to limit my discussion of chess to how it was understood by the important men of Henry II's kingdom. Fortunately four of Richard's contemporaries—Walter Map, John of Salisbury, William fitz Stephen, and Alexander Neckam—wrote about their views on chess and other games. As all of these men were clerics who held important secular and ecclesiastical offices, they were Richard's contemporaries not only in time and place, but also in status and profession. Yet, despite these similarities, each of these men had very different views about the rewards and risks of playing games and so can provide different insights into what Richard might have hoped to gain by casting his treatise within the framework of a gaming mentality.

Let us begin with the two authors who have the least to say about chess. Both William fitz Stephen (d. 1191)<sup>35</sup> and John of Salisbury (ca. 1115–1180)<sup>36</sup> mention chess only in passing, but both authors do have quite a bit to say about other games and pastimes. William twice mentions that Thomas Becket played chess in his *Vita* of the saint, but he does not comment much on this fact.<sup>37</sup> He notes that Becket also hunted with birds and dogs. But, although he engaged in these activities frequently, he did not take these games too

<sup>35</sup> William held a variety of offices in the administrations of both King Henry II and Archbishop Thomas Becket. See *The Lives of Thomas Becket*, trans. and annotated by Michael Staunton. Manchester Medieval Sources Series (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 8–9. Additional information about William and additional translations of his *Vita* of Becket are in George Greenaway, ed. and trans., *The Life and Death of Thomas Becket* (London: Folio Society, 1961). See also, Michael Staunton, *Thomas Becket and His Biographers*. Studies in the History of Medieval Religion, 28 (Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), which contains information on both William fitz Stephen and John of Salisbury.

<sup>36</sup> For biographical information on John, see the introductions to the *Policraticus* (cited above, in note 10) as well as the introduction to his other great work, *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts*, trans. with introduction and notes by Daniel D. McGarry (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955). See also the collection of John's letters: *Letters*, ed. and trans. W. J. Millor and H. E. Butler, rev. by C. N. L. Brooke (London: Nelson, 1955 / Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

<sup>37</sup> *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, ed. James Craigie Robertson (London: Longman, 1877), 3:20, 25. He also mentions that the Exchequer took its name from the game of chess, although he points out the reasoning is not quite right: "[it is] a quadrangular table, which is commonly called the Exchequer/chessboard because of the counters of two colors; but it is rather the table of the king's white-colored coins...(my translation)" ("...quadrangulam tabulam, quae dicitur Calculis bicoloris, vulgo Scaccarium; potius autem est regis tabula nummis albicoloribus....") (51).

seriously.<sup>38</sup> In fact, this is typical of William's treatment of games in general. Nine of the 25 chapters in William's "Description of London" deal with the recreations of Londoners; but, unlike his clerical contemporaries, he does not pass judgment on these games—even those played on holy days.<sup>39</sup> John is far more critical of games, dedicating two of the chapters of his *Policraticus* to hunting and dice and board games, both of which he considers disruptive activities for the most part.<sup>40</sup> It is likely that he meant chess by *calculus*,<sup>41</sup> which he links with a number of dice games.<sup>42</sup> As discussed above, gambling on the outcome of a chess match was quite common, and as we will see below, Alexander Neckam also made this connection. The main problem with gambling, as John explains, is that it "is the mother of liars and perjury for she is prodigal as the result of her lust for others' possessions and, having no respect for private property, as soon as she has squandered her own, gradually has recourse to theft and rapine."<sup>43</sup> Our other two authors make far more explicit the idea that games—especially the game of chess—are both symbolic of and can contribute to social ills, like covetousness and violence.

Walter Map (ca. 1130–1210) was a cleric and courtier of Henry II.<sup>44</sup> In the 1180s and 1190s he wrote a collection of stories that both lampooned and

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<sup>38</sup> "Ludebat plerumque, sed perfunctorie, non dedita opera, in avibus caeli, nisis et accipitribus suis, et canibus venaticis, et in calculis bicoloribus 'Insidiosorum ludebat bella latronum'" (Robertson, *Materials*, 20 [see note 37]). It is unclear what William meant to imply by including the quotation from Martial's epigram on *calculi* (XIV.18), which reads: "insidiosorum si ludis bella latronum, gemmeus iste tibi miles et hostis erit." Perhaps this was foreshadowing that as with pieces in a game, friends and enemies were made of the same material and sometimes took the form of the same person (i.e. Henry II). For more on this epigram, see *Martial—Book XIV: The Apophoreta*, text with introduction and commentary by T. J. Leary (London: Duckworth, 1996), 71.

<sup>39</sup> Robertson, *Materials*, 8–12 (see note 37).

<sup>40</sup> Book I, chapters 4–5. Clemens C. I. Webb, *Ioannis Saresberiensis Episcopi Carnotensis Policratici* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909) 1:21–38; for a more recent edition, see *Ioannis Saresberiensis Policraticus I–IV*, ed. K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), 29–46; for a translation, see Pike, *Frivolities of Courtiers*, 13–29 (see note 10). The one game that John does consider worthwhile is rithmomachia, because it teaches its players about mathematics. This game is alluded to in book I, chapter 5. John also uses a rithmomachia analogy in one of his letters. See Ann E. Moyer, *The Philosophers' Game: Rithmomachia in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*. Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Civilization. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 37. For more on this game, see note 59.

<sup>41</sup> Calculus is one of the names for chess used by William fitz Stephen and Alexander Neckam.

<sup>42</sup> Webb, *Ioannis Saresberiensis*, 36 (see note 40).

<sup>43</sup> Pike, *Frivolities of Courtiers*, 27–28 (see note 10). "Mendaciorum siquidem et periuriorum mater est alea, et ex alieni concupiscentia sua prodigit, et nullam habens patrimonii reuerentiam, cum illud effuderit, sensim in furta dilabatur et rapinas" (Webb, *Ioannis Saresberiensis*, 36 [see note 40]).

<sup>44</sup> Biographical information is taken from Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium / Courtiers' Trifles*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, rev. by C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors. Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), xiii–xix.

educated his fellow courtiers.<sup>45</sup> One of the illustrative tales is about a feud between two noble families, which is in part played out during chess matches.<sup>46</sup> In this story the queen of the Bretons has the count of Leon castrated and blinded for a perceived insult. In order to restore the peace, the king of the French—brother of the queen of the Bretons—has his sister's daughter married to the son of the mutilated man. During a chess match which the daughter wins, she insults her husband by reminding him of his father's wounds, and so the husband proceeds to exact vengeance by doing the same to her father. At the conclusion of their next match, which he wins, he presents her with her father's eyes. The woman then conspires with her lover to kill her husband. The new couple has both a son and a daughter, whose husband tries to kill her brother, so he can be lord of the land. After much conspiring among various other characters, who try to take advantage of the situation to better their own positions, the son captures his brother-in-law and hangs him for treason. As order is finally restored to a kingdom wreaked by three generations of feuding, Walter tells us what the moral of the story is:

Any reader who may think fit to peruse this will learn, from the many and diverse crimes here told, to arm himself with caution, but he will not be able to keep it intact unless with the strongest of bridles he curb his covetousness—covetousness which, more hardly than hunger or thirst and more foully than other pressure, drives men into the depths of wickedness. For this it was that caused all these enormities.<sup>47</sup>

The idea that covetousness would lead to one's downfall was certainly a good lesson for royal officials to learn. Whether they were playing chess or helping to administer a kingdom, they should take only what they need. As will be

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<sup>45</sup> As Brooke explains, "The book is suspended between being a parody of a 'Mirror for Princes' and providing *exempla* to edify its readers. But it was never made public, and it may well be that the author never made up his mind what his purpose was" (James, *De Nugis*, xxxiii). For more on the culture and literary activities of Henry II's court, see Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones, ed., *Writers in the Reign of Henry II: Twelve Essays*. New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); see also Christopher Harper-Bill and Nicholas Vincent, ed., *Henry II: New Interpretations* (Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> *De Nugis Curialium*, Dist. iv, c. 15 (James, *De Nugis*, 377–93 [see note 44]). Interestingly, William Ian Miller advances a theory of a "balanced-exchange model of feud," which also bears some similarities to a game: "careful scorekeeping, an alternating rhythm of giving and taking, inflicting and being afflicted." *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 182–85.

<sup>47</sup> "Quicunque lector hec perlegere dignatus fuerit, ex multis et diuersis hinc edoctus iniuriis ad cautelam armabitur, quam obseruare cum indemnitate non poterit, nisi fortissimo compescuerit auariciam freno, que fame arcus et siti omnique necessitate fedius impellit in profundum nequicie. Nam et hec horum causa fuit excessuum" (James, *De Nugis*, 393 [see note 44]).

demonstrated below, this was also an idea that Richard tried to impress upon his readers through the use of chess imagery.

Alexander Neckam (1157–1217) also relates a number of stories in which chess plays a role. Unlike Walter, however, he does not see lessons in the game of chess, but rather reasons to avoid it. He includes a description of chess in his encyclopedic *De Naturis Rerum*, but he places it in the chapter between gambling and hypocrisy.<sup>48</sup> Neckam's thematic pairing of gambling and chess was common in ecclesiastical condemnations of the game. In the eleventh century, Peter Damian upbraided the Bishop of Florence for engaging in what Peter regarded as a vile pastime, unbecoming for an ecclesiastic. The bishop protested that chess and gambling with dice were not the same thing. This argument failed to persuade Peter, who eventually convinced the bishop of his sin.<sup>49</sup> For Neckam, though, there were other good reasons to bookend his critique of chess with these other two social ills. The structure of the game itself was problematical. The pawn departed from the straight path to take vengeance for wrongs and transgressed gender and status boundaries by being transformed into a queen upon reaching the final rank on the board.<sup>50</sup> But this is nothing compared to the real life violence the game promoted, because of the misplaced and destructive passions it stirred in its devotees. In his discussion of "the vanity of chess" [*vanitatem ludi scaccorum*], he describes how players become suddenly angry: "often insults are exchanged in the middle [of the

<sup>48</sup> Alexander Neckam, *De Naturis Rerum*, ed. Thomas Wright (London: Longman, 1863), 324–26. See lxxi–lxxii as well as Murray, *A History of Chess*, 501 (see note 4) for a partial summary of this passage. Unfortunately there is no English translation of Neckam's monumental work. The translations that follow are my own. However, for a very engaging study based on this text, see Urban Tigner Holmes, Jr. *Daily Living in the Twelfth Century: Based on the Observations of Alexander Neckam in London and Paris* (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952). For additional biographical information, see Josiah C. Russell, "Alexander Neckam in England," *English Historical Review* 47 (1932), 260–68; see also R. W. Hunt, *The Schools and the Cloister: The Life and Writings of Alexander Nequam (1157–1217)*, ed. and rev. by Margaret Gibson (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1984).

<sup>49</sup> Peter Damian, *Letters*, trans. Owen J. Blum (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 2: 387–88.

<sup>50</sup> "The pawn advances in a straight path, except when he takes vengeance on an enemy for his wrongs. For then he moves obliquely, when it is done as a robber. When, however, the course having been completed, he reaches the final line, he obtains the dignity of the queen, but he seems rendered destitute of sex by the privilege. Coming to his end [of the board] he is made like Tiresias [i.e. his sex is changed], and he enjoys a new move, another Iphis. [Actually, Iphis was transformed from a woman into a man. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, IX, 666–797.] He, who was moving in a straight line as long as he was a common person, moves obliquely after he is elevated" (Pedes directo tramite incedit, nisi cum injurias suas in hoste persequitur. Tunc enim gressum obliquat, cum praedo efficitur. Cum vero expleto cursu ultimam tenet lineam reginae dignitatem adipiscitur, sed sexus privilegio destitui videtur. Tiresiatur veniens ad Gades suas, novoque fruitur incesso, Iphis alter. Angulariter incedit postquam sublimatus est qui in directum tendebat quamdiu privata erat persona) Neckam, *De Naturis Rerum* 324–25 (see note 48).



game],” which “degenerates into a brawl” [*saepe in medium convitia proferuntur...in rixam degenerat*].<sup>51</sup> Walter Map’s story certainly seems to corroborate this, although in that story chess functions also as a symbolic representation of animosity already existing between the players. Neckam concludes by lamenting: “Oh how many thousands of souls were sent to hell because of that game, in which Reginald, the son of Eymund, playing at chess, killed with a chessboard a noble knight playing with him in the palace of Charlemagne.”<sup>52</sup>

Based on Neckam’s condemnation, it appears inappropriate for Richard, either as an administrator or as a cleric, to compare his occupation at the Exchequer to a game of chess. Why then should he make this comparison? As his fictional disciple explains, “‘You won’t be writing about the liberal arts, but about the customs and laws of the exchequer, for which one must use ordinary words, so that these things may become common knowledge, and so that the language used is related to the things under discussion.’”<sup>53</sup> Chess had been an important part of aristocratic discourse well before Richard wrote his Dialogue. In the early twelfth century, Petrus Alfonsi, Henry I’s physician and author of the extremely popular *Disciplina Clericalis*, listed chess as one of the seven knightly skills along with riding, swimming, archery, boxing, hawking, and verse writing.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Richard is speaking the common language of the officials at the Exchequer and the sheriffs who would come there to render accounts, as well as the king he served and to whom the Dialogue was dedicated.<sup>55</sup> He is not using the language of academics, who he claims “take many subjects and wrap them up in obscure language, to avoid seeming to know too little about many things, and so that the arts will seem more

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<sup>51</sup> Neckam, *De Naturis Rerum*, 325–26 (see note 48).

<sup>52</sup> “O quot millia animarum Orco transmissa sunt occasione illius ludi quo Reginaldus filius Eymundi in calculis ludens militem generosum cum illo ludentem in palatio Karoli magni cum uno scaccorum interemit” (Neckam, *De Naturis Rerum*, 326 [see note 48]).

<sup>53</sup> “Tu scribendam artem non suscipis set quasdam consuetudines et iura scaccarii, que quia communia debent esse, communibus necessario utendum est uerbis ut sint cognati sermones rebus de quibus loquimur” (Amt, *Dialogus*, 8–9 [see note 3]).

<sup>54</sup> Eberhard Hermes, trans. and ed., *The Disciplina Clericalis of Petrus Alfonsi*, trans. P. R. Quarrie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 115. On the uses and popularity of this text, see John Tolan, “A Sea of Stories: Medieval Readings of the *Disciplina Clericalis*,” *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993), 132–58. For the importance of chess in an aristocratic education, see Richard Eales, “The Game of Chess: An Aspect of Medieval Knightly Culture,” *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood*, ed. C. Harper-Bill and Ruth Harvey (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1986), 23. See also Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocrats, 1066–1530* (London: Methuen, 1984), 178–79.

<sup>55</sup> Amt, *Dialogus*, 2–5 (see note 3).

difficult.”<sup>56</sup> He uses the imagery of games because it is a familiar discourse for those sitting at the Exchequer. He might also be using the imagery of games because his education at a monastic school would have taught him that board games served a pedagogical function. In twelfth-century English schools the mathematical board game called rithmomachia was used to teach arithmetic, while chess was sometimes used to teach geometry.<sup>57</sup> The usefulness of chess as a pedagogical aid is also demonstrated in the thirteenth-century morality treatises composed by friars.<sup>58</sup>

Within the context of the Exchequer, chess was well suited to teach about processes of social interactions, rules, strategies, and symbolic value.<sup>59</sup> But,

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<sup>56</sup> “...ne multa parum scisse uiderentur et ut ars difficilior cognitu fieret, multa conquisierunt et uerbis incognitis palliarunt” (Amt, *Dialogus*, 8–9 [see note 3]).

<sup>57</sup> For an analysis of how both chess and rithmomachia served as mathematical teaching devices in twelfth-century England, see Charles Burnett, “The Instruments Which Are the Proper Delights of the Quadrivium: Rhythmomachy and Chess in the Teaching of Arithmetic in Twelfth-Century England,” *Viator* 28 (1997), 175–201. See also Moyer, *The Philosophers’ Game*, 17–52, and Gillian R. Evans, “The Rithmomachia: A Medieval Mathematical Teaching Aid?” *Janus* 63 (1976), 257–73.

<sup>58</sup> For accounts of these, see Murray, *A History of Chess*, 529–63 (see note 4); for a fascinating analysis of the most famous of these moralities, see Jenny Adams’s chapter, “(Re)moving the King: Ideals of Civic Order in Jacobus de Cessolis’s *Liber de ludo scachorum*,” *Power Play: The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 15–56. See also Jenny Adams’ essay in this volume. Still today some chess masters argue that the game can teach us life lessons. For examples, see Bruce Pandolfini, *Every Move Must Have a Purpose: Strategies from Chess for Business and Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2003); see also Anatoly Karpov and Jean-François Phelizon, with Bachar Kouatly, *Chess and the Art of Negotiation: Ancient Rules for Modern Combat* (Westport, CT, and London: Praeger, 2006). Of course, the parallels between life and chess can be taken too far. For an example of this, see (at your own risk!) Wallace E. Neville, “*Chess-Humanics*.” *A Philosophy of Chess. A Social Allegory. Parallelisms between the Game of Chess and Our Larger Human Affairs* (San Francisco: Whitaker and Ray, 1905). This book is just a collection of quotations and rambling thoughts, which bear only a superficial connection to the game of chess. For example, Neville uses the different colored pieces to justify a racist rant, and seemingly every aspect of the game inspires the author to express Sinophobic sentiments.

<sup>59</sup> Symbolic value was of particular importance, because Richard knew people who remembered payments being made to the king in kind rather than in coin (Amt, *Dialogus*, 62–63 [see note 3]). For the role of money in English policy in the late twelfth century, see Cary J. Nederman, “The Origins of ‘Policy’: Fiscal Administration and Economic Principles in Later Twelfth-Century England,” *Rhetoric and Renewal in the Latin West 1100–1540: Essays in Honor of John O. Ward*, ed. Constant J. Mews et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 149–68. Symbolic value was also important because the same counter was used on the Exchequer board for a number of different purposes, as Richard explains: “the same penny, used as a counter, can represent a shilling, a pound, a hundred pounds, or a thousand: “...idem denarius pro calculo missus nunc unum nunc solidum nunc libram nunc centum nunc mille significet,” Amt, *Dialogus*, 38–39. In addition, as Poole explains, “the only currency employed [in England in the twelfth century] was the silver penny, and the pound was a term of account meaning 240 of these pennies” (*The Exchequer*, 82 [see note 6]). For more on symbolic value, see my arguments below on the Exchequer as an abacus.

most importantly, chess could be used to teach about the necessity of flexibility within a context of established rules and guidelines. Richard Eales persuasively argues that in the Middle Ages, "Chess stands for the complexities of political maneuvering in general, courteous but purposeful."<sup>60</sup> The same qualities that Eales describes to explain the lure of chess for knights must also have compelled Richard to incorporate the imagery into his Dialogue: "...qualities of cunning and calculation, with the ability to bend the rules without dishonourably breaking them."<sup>61</sup> In fact, we shall see that the ability to bend the rules without dishonorably breaking them will be an important consideration in understanding the game of the Exchequer.

Let us explore Richard's chess analogy a little further here to determine what he meant when he called the chess match between himself and the sheriffs a "conflict and a battle" [*conflictus...et pugna*].<sup>62</sup> It is important to recognize that chess as it was played in the twelfth century is not exactly the same game we play today. The game we play today is a reformed version of chess that emerged around the turn of the sixteenth century.<sup>63</sup> In medieval chess, the queen or vizier was the weakest piece on the board, and could move only one square diagonally.<sup>64</sup> The bishop was also a much weaker piece, as it moved only two spaces at a time. These restrictions inevitably slowed down play, and as a result, the goals of the game (mate in a certain number of moves or in a certain position on the board) could be agreed upon before the game commenced.<sup>65</sup> These agreements serve to highlight the application of chess as a social process in which rules were established, but objectives could be negotiated. In addition, the rules could be more or less strictly enforced. You could allow an opponent to take back a move or point out that a piece is

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<sup>60</sup> Eales, "Aspect," 25 (see note 54).

<sup>61</sup> Eales, "Aspect," 31 (see note 54). See also Daniel E. O'Sullivan's essay in this volume.

<sup>62</sup> Amt, Dialogue, 10 (see note 3).

<sup>63</sup> See Richard Eales, *Chess: The History of a Game* (New York and Oxford: Facts On File, 1986).

<sup>64</sup> For analyses of how medieval authors used the imagery of the chess queen to both subvert and reinforce the weak position of women in late medieval society, see Steven M. Taylor, "God's Queen: Chess Imagery in the Poetry of Gautier de Coinci," *Fifteenth Century Studies* 17 (1990), 403–19; Marilyn Yalom, *Birth of the Chess Queen* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).

<sup>65</sup> One of the most popular forms of this modified version of chess was the chess problem, which had first been developed by Muslims. For an analysis and explanation of this *jocus partitus* ("divided game" from which we get the word "jeopardy") see Murray, *A History of Chess*, 546–735 (see note 4). For medieval English examples see *Les Gius Partiz des Eschez: Two Anglo-Norman Chess Treatises*, ed. Tony Hunt. Plain Texts Series, 3 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1985). Dice could also be used to speed up play if the players agreed to this provision. This version of the game still allowed some variety, though. The six sides of the die corresponded to each of the six pieces; but, with the exception of the king and queen, the player would be able to choose which piece she wanted to move. For examples of this form of chess in medieval literature, see Murray, *A History of Chess*, 410 (see note 4).

threatened, depending on the social context in which the game is played.<sup>66</sup> Also, if we think of chess as a war game, we must remember how rare pitched battles were in the twelfth century.<sup>67</sup> Rather, war bore a much closer resemblance to the early tournament, in which combatants were usually captured and ransomed rather than killed. In fact, in some passages in the early thirteenth-century biography of William Marshal, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether William is fighting in a battle or in a tournament.<sup>68</sup> Also, as in the tournaments described by William's biographer, the game of the Exchequer was what game theorists called an iterated contest, in which one's reputation mattered because of the likelihood of encountering the same opponents time and again.<sup>69</sup> Certainly the game of the Exchequer was a *conflictus et pugna*, but it was part of a larger social process in which there was more at stake than the outcome of a single match. Perhaps this was one of the lessons Richard was trying to teach his readers about the Exchequer.

In order to illustrate this, let us turn to the beginning of the first book of the Dialogue, in which the disciple asks: "*Quid est scaccarium?*" The master responds:

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<sup>66</sup> Snorri Sturlason's *Heimskringla* provides a rather extreme example of what can happen when one refuses to let one's opponent take back a move, as King Canute has his brother-in-law murdered after he refused to let the king replay a move. Samuel Lang, trans., "Saga of Olaf Haraldson" (London: Norroena Society, 1907), ch. 162 and 163.

<sup>67</sup> On the pitched battle in the Middle Ages, see Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. Michael Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 228–37, and Catherine Hanley, *War and Combat, 1150–1270: The Evidence from Old French Literature* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), 20–22.

<sup>68</sup> For example, compare lines 892–1007 and 2797–2874 of A. J. Holden, ed., *History of William Marshal*, trans. S. Gregory and notes by David Crouch. Occasional Publications Series, 5 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2002), 1:47–53, 143–47. There is a huge literature on the tournament and chivalric violence. Among the best recent studies are David Crouch, *Tournament* (London and New York: Hambledon, 2005); Richard Barber and Juliet Barker, *Tournaments* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989); Joachim Bumke, "Tournaments," *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Woodstock, NY: Overview Press, 2000), 247–73; John Baldwin, "Chivalric Prowess," *Aristocratic Life in Medieval France* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 68–97; Matthew Strickland, "Conduct in Battle: A Brotherhood in Arms," *War and Chivalry: The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066–1217*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 132–58; Larry D. Benson, "The Tournament in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes & L'Histoire de Guillaume Le Maréchal," *Chivalric Literature*, ed. Larry D. Benson and John Leyerle. Studies in Medieval Culture, 14 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1980), 1–24; Ruth Mazo Karras, "Mail Bonding: Knights, Ladies, and the Proving of Manhood," *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 20–66; Malcolm Vale, *War and Chivalry* (London: Duckworth, 1981); Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984).

<sup>69</sup> For an introduction to game theory and what it can teach us about conflict and cooperation, see Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

The exchequer is a rectangular board, about ten feet long and five feet wide, which those sitting around it use like a table. It has a raised edge about four finger-widths high, so that nothing placed on it can fall off. Over this aforementioned exchequer is placed a cloth bought during the Easter term, not an ordinary cloth, but black, marked with lines a foot or a spread hand's width apart. Counters are placed in the spaces in a certain way.<sup>70</sup>

The disciple persists: "What is the reason for this name?" To which the master replies: "The best explanation I can think of at the moment is that it looks like an 'exchequer', or a chessboard." Yet the scholar is not convinced, and so he asks: "Do you think that was the only reason our wise ancestors gave it that name? Because they could just as well have called it a checkerboard."<sup>71</sup> Here we must pause and clarify a point about the game that the Exchequer resembles. Amt has translated *tabularium* as "checkerboard," and another translator of Richard's text has rendered this word as "draught-board."<sup>72</sup> But it is more probable that the game Richard was referring to was "tables," a medieval predecessor of backgammon, which is also called *tabularium*. In fact, based solely on the visual appearance of the board, *tabularium* would have a much stronger case than *scaccarium*. The tables board is rectangular and upon it are placed round counters like the Exchequer.<sup>73</sup> Yet, tables combined skill with luck as it employed dice, and was, therefore, not considered as strategic as chess.<sup>74</sup> While the workings of the Exchequer might be described as a game, it was not a game of chance, as Richard makes clear: "For the exchequer operates by its own

<sup>70</sup> "Scaccarium tabula quadrangula est que longitudinis quasi decem pedum, latitudinis quinque ad modum mense circumsedentibus apposita undique habet limbum altitudinis quasi quatuor digitorum ne quid appositum excidat. Superponitur autem scaccario superiori pannus in termino Pasche emptus, non quilibet, set niger uirgis distinctus, distantibus a se uirgis uel pedis uel palme extente spatio. In spatiis autem calculi fiunt iuxta ordines suos..." (Amt, *Dialogus*, 8–9 [see note 3]).

<sup>71</sup> "Discipulus: Que est ratio huius nominis? Magister: Nulla mihi uerior ad presens occurrit quam quia scaccarii lusilis similem habet formam. Discipulus: Numquid antiquorum prudentia pro sola forma sic nominauit? Cum et simili ratione posset tabularium appellari" (Amt, *Dialogus*, 10–11 [see note 3]).

<sup>72</sup> Amt, *Dialogus*, 10–11 (see note 3); David Douglas and G. W. Greenaway, eds., *English Historical Documents Volume II: 1042–1189*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Eyre Methuen / New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 527. It is very unlikely that this is the game Richard had in mind, as checkers was not widely played until later in the Middle Ages. See H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Board-Games Other Than Chess* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 76. Checkers also misrepresents how the contest should be conceptualized. In checkers, the purpose is to capture all of your opponents' pieces. This is not the purpose of chess or the game of the Exchequer. In these games you need only to capture enough material to accomplish your objective, whether that is mating the king or ensuring that the king has enough money to rule effectively.

<sup>73</sup> See H. J. R. Murray, "The Medieval Game of Tables," *Medium Aevum* 10 (1941), 57–69; see also Murray, *Board-Games*, 117–20 (see note 72).

<sup>74</sup> The Song of Roland makes this distinction clear, as the younger knights are playing tables, while the "older and wiser" ones are playing chess (lines 110–14).

laws, which are not arbitrary but derive from the deliberations of great men.”<sup>75</sup> The dimensions of the Exchequer table also resemble the board for the game of rithmomachia. But, as stated above, rithmomachia was used to teach arithmetic, an art that had no place in the Exchequer: “Now, this work is done according to the customary procedure of the exchequer, not the laws of arithmetic.”<sup>76</sup> Despite this, however, almost all scholars of the Exchequer table have referred to it as an abacus, and several have searched for the innovation of its use with the introduction of the abacus into England.<sup>77</sup> Yet, if the Exchequer board had been based on the abacus, why would Richard have ignored this point?<sup>78</sup> It seems possible that Richard really did think that the Exchequer board was conceptually linked to the game of chess. The Exchequer board was a device for comparison, not for computation.<sup>79</sup> Also, as Gillian R. Evans correctly points out, the study of the abacus was “*difficillima et ardua*.”<sup>80</sup> Because of this, it was a specialized form of knowledge that the sheriffs and perhaps even most of the Exchequer officials were unlikely to possess. This would defeat the purpose of a public audit, as the witnesses would have no idea what was going on.<sup>81</sup> Besides, what took place on the Exchequer board was usually really a fairly simple process which required very little

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<sup>75</sup> “Sane scaccarium suis legibus non temere set magnorum consideratione subsistit...” (Amt, *Dialogus*, 4–5 [see note 3]).

<sup>76</sup> “Huius autem hec est ratio secundum consuetum cursum scaccarii non legibus arismetis” (Amt, *Dialogus*, 36–37 [see note 3]).

<sup>77</sup> Charles Homer Haskins, “The Abacus and the Exchequer,” *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science*. Harvard Historical Studies, 27 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), 327–35. See also, Poole, *The Exchequer*, 42–57 (see note 6), and Johnson, *Dialogus de Scaccario*, xxxv–xxxvii (see note 3). Gillian R. Evans, however, convincingly argues that “the Exchequer board has only the most tenuous claim to be called an abacus,” “Schools and Scholars: The Study of the Abacus in English Schools c. 980–c. 1150,” *English Historical Review* 94 (1979), 79.

<sup>78</sup> There is also the fact that rather than employing a base-ten system, as an abacus does, the Exchequer used a system of twelve and twenty. The first column was for pence, followed by shillings, then pounds, then scores of pounds (Amt, *Dialogus*, 37); see also, Evans, “Schools,” 79 (see note 77).

<sup>79</sup> I want to once again thank Paul Hyams for convincing me early in my research that the Exchequer was a VDU (visual display unit) not a CPU (central processing unit).

<sup>80</sup> Gillian R. Evans, “*Difficillima et Ardua*: Theory and Practice in the Treatises on the Abacus, 950–1150,” *Journal of Medieval History* 3 (1977), 21–38. Alexander Neckam also considered the “calculations” of the Exchequer as far inferior to the real art of arithmetic. See Hunt, *Schools*, 9 (see note 48); cited in Turner, *Men*, 12 (see note 8).

<sup>81</sup> Gillian Evans correctly points out that “the method used is intended to enable everyone present, whether or not he has any training in arithmetic, to see that the calculations are being carried out correctly (“Schools,” 78–79 [see note 77]). She then references the following passage in the *Dialogue*: “But [the calculator] must be careful not to let his hand get ahead of his tongue, or vice versa, but to place the counters and say the numbers aloud, at the same time that he is thinking them, lest there be an error in the number” (Cauendum uero est ne manus preambula linguam preueniat uel ex euerso; set simul qui computat, et calculum mittat et numerum designet, ne sit error in numero) Amt, *Dialogus*, 36–37 (see note 3).

mathematical knowledge.<sup>82</sup> Counters indicating what the sheriff owed were placed on one side of the board, while counters indicating what he had paid were placed on the other side of the board; then they were compared. The symbolic pieces on either side of the board should mirror each other, as they do at the beginning of a game of chess. What better way could there have been to explain the justness and equity of the audit than to conceptually link it with the game of chess?<sup>83</sup>

Richard also argues that this chess analogy can be extended from the board itself to the social process of audit, as he tells his disciple:

I was right to call you meticulous. There is another, less obvious, reason. For just as in a chess game the pieces have a certain order and move or stand still according to certain laws and within certain parameters, some ranking higher and some leading the way, in the same way, at the exchequer, some preside and others have seats because of their official positions, and no one is free to act outside the established rules, as will be clear from what is to follow. Also, just as, in chess, battle is joined between the kings, so at the exchequer there is basically a competition and struggle between two individuals, namely the treasurer and the sheriff who makes his account to the others sitting there as arbiters, so that they may see and judge.<sup>84</sup>

Let us compare this conceptual game to the process of audit to see how useful Richard's pedagogical tool is:

Moreover, when [the sheriff] appears and has sat down, the other sheriffs are kept out, and he sits alone with his own men to answer questions. [...] Then, with everyone sitting and listening, the treasurer, who, as has been said, seems by reason of his office to be his adversary, must ask whether he is ready to render his account. When he answers, 'I am ready', the treasurer continues....<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The calculator, who placed the counters on the table, was really much more like a croupier than a mathematician.

<sup>83</sup> In the late twelfth century chess was pictorially linked with justice in a mosaic in an Italian church. See William Tronzo, "Moral Hieroglyphs: Chess and Dice at San Savino in Piacenza," *Gesta* 16.2 (1977), 15–26.

<sup>84</sup> "Merito te scrupulosum dixi. Est et alia set occultior: sicut enim in scaccario lusili quidam ordines sunt pugnatorum et certis legibus uel limitibus procedunt uel subsistunt, presidentibus aliis et aliis precedentibus, sic in hoc quidam president quidam assident ex officio, et non est cuiquam liberum leges constitutas excedere, quod erit ex consequentibus manifestum. Item, sicut in lusili pugna committitur inter reges, sic in hoc inter duos principaliter conflictus est et pugna committitur, thesaurarium scilicet et uicecomitem qui assidet ad compotum residentibus aliis tanquam iudicibus ut uideant et iudicent," (Amt, *Dialogus*, 10–11 [see note 3]).

<sup>85</sup> "Cum autem accesserit et iam residerit, alii uicecomites excludantur, et resideat solus cum suis ad interrogata responsurus. [...] Tunc, sedentibus et audientibus omnibus, thesaurarius, qui, sicut dictum est, ratione officii sibi uidetur aduersari, querat si paratus est reddere compotum suum; quo respondente, 'Presto sum', inferat thesaurarius..." (Amt, *Dialogus*, 126–27 [see note 3]).

This process bears many similarities to a structured game, like chess. The great hall in which the Exchequer was held was the same space in which a chess match often would take place. The other sheriffs are excluded from this space, because as possible “kibitzers” (to use a chess term) they may try to help the sheriff play.<sup>86</sup> There is a ritual beginning, and then the audit proceeds according to the rules of the Exchequer. It is also important to point out that there are about 20 people gathered around a fairly small table, all but two of which were part of the administration.<sup>87</sup> This environment certainly contributed to a position of power from which the treasurer could negotiate. If the rules were to be bent, this environment was meant to ensure that they would be bent by the treasurer.

The presence of judges was also important for the treasurer, because the sheriffs were often not able to pay all the money that was due.<sup>88</sup> It was up to the treasurer to determine why and how to respond accordingly, for he was responsible to the king for this money. Richard acknowledges that sometimes debtors do not have the funds to pay the sheriffs,<sup>89</sup> but the difficulty for the treasurer is in determining whether the sheriff really is unable to pay. This is, in fact, the most difficult aspect of the game of the Exchequer, and the one upon which the effective operation of the Exchequer depends. As Richard states:

For the greatest skill of the exchequer lies not in calculations but in its multifarious judgments. After all, it is a simple matter, given the sum due and the amounts of the payments to be subtracted from it, to tell whether the debt has been paid in full

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<sup>86</sup> Kibitzing was quite common in the Middle Ages (Murray, *A History of Chess*, 475–76 [see note 4]). In the example of *Huon of Bordeaux* referred to above in note 36, Huon and the king agree that kibitzing is to be forbidden, which implies that it was the norm. For visual representations of kibitzing, see the images in Alfonso X el Sabio’s *Libro de acedrex, dados e tables*, f. 8r, f. 19v, f. 20r, f. 20v, f. 21v. <http://games.rengeekcentral.com> (last accessed March 15, 2011). See also Sonja Musser Golladay’s article, “Images of Medieval Spanish Chess and Captive Damsels in Distress,” in this volume.

<sup>87</sup> Peter Haidu points out that the Exchequer “territorializes a *conflictus* in which every participant—like a chess piece—has a specified place, position, and role, centering around two officials as the essential antagonists: the treasurer and the sheriff. The Exchequer is a table is a chessboard is a prop in a theatricalized political ritual” (Haidu, *Subject Medieval/Modern*, 185 [see note 5]). David Antin also makes a very interesting point about the territoriality of the chessboard—one that could certainly complicate our analysis of Richard’s chess analogy. As Antin points out, although every piece begins the game assigned to its proper place, once the game commences, possession of any particular space immediately becomes contested: “The image of the world reflected by the chessboard involves a paradox of order and disorder: the pieces are carefully arranged in accordance with rank, disposed symmetrically on both sides of the royal couple, and the two opposing forces represent precise mirror images of each other; however, in contrast to this there is no precise demarcation or limit barring the entry of one side into the territory of the other and, as a result, territorial domain is relatively uncertain.” David Antin, “Caxton’s the Game and Playe of Chesse,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 29 (1968), 273. Such an understanding of territoriality would certainly be important to the sheriffs at a time in which the king was trying to limit local power.

<sup>88</sup> Poole, *The Exchequer*, 166 (see note 6).

<sup>89</sup> Amt, *Dialogus*, 160–65 (see note 3).



or whether there is a balance due. But when a complex question arises about monies that come to the treasury through various means, and are required in different ways, and are not collected in the same way by the sheriffs, it is a weightier matter to decide whether the sheriffs have made mistakes, and so this is considered the more important expertise of the exchequer.<sup>90</sup>

As this passage illustrates, rules could be more or less strictly enforced depending on particular circumstances.<sup>91</sup> In fact, Richard praises Henry for forgiving those who rebelled against him a few years before the composition of his *Dialogue*.<sup>92</sup> Having come of age during the civil war following Henry I's death, and on two occasions having served as a hostage to ensure his father's loyalty, Richard knew something about the role of forgiveness in good governance.<sup>93</sup>

This leniency could not be taken too far, however, as demonstrated by the 1170 Inquest of Sheriffs. As a result of the sheriffs' misappropriation of funds (to use a modern expression) or their excessive covetousness (to use the lesson from Walter Map's story) most of the sheriffs were dismissed and replaced by officials of the Exchequer.<sup>94</sup> Richard does not say anything about this, and perhaps he did not interpret it as the major event modern historians took it to

<sup>90</sup> "Non enim in ratiociniis set in multiplicibus iudiciis excellens scaccarii scientia consistit. Facile enim est, proposita summa que exigitur et suppositis ad collationem eius his que soluta sunt, per subtractionem discernere, si satisfactum est uel si quid restat. At cum ceperit multiplex inquisitio fieri de his rebus, que uarie fisco proueniunt, et diuersis modis requiruntur et a uicecomitibus non eodem modo perquiruntur, discernere si secus egerint quibusdam graue est, et ob hoc circa hoc scientia scaccarii maior esse dicitur" (Amt, *Dialogus*, 22–23 [see note 3]).

<sup>91</sup> Leniency and the willingness to bend the rules can also be a manifestation of efficiency. In his analysis of the medieval genealogy of modern states, Joseph R. Strayer argues that the Exchequer "was too bound by its own rules (it could spend ten pounds to recover a debt of ten pence)." *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 38. It can also be a representation of power, as inferiors must ask for the forgiveness of superiors, just as someone who has made a bad move in chess must ask his opponent if he can take it back.

<sup>92</sup> Amt, *Dialogus*, 114–17 (see note 3). See also Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075–1225*. New Oxford History of England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 59. Richard also makes Henry's leniency clear in his description of the harsh punishments that could be meted out to a sheriff who failed to show up for his audit: "It is unlikely that the king will accede to this method of punishment, since his singular grace is slow to punish and quick to reward" ("Hunc autem pene modum uelle regem admittere satis probabile est, cum eius gratia singularis ad penam pigra sit et hec ad premia uelox") (Amt, *Dialogus*, 120–1 [see note 3]).

<sup>93</sup> *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth*, trans. Janet Fairweather (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 410; see also Bartlett, *England under the Norman*, 49–50 (see note 92) and Amt, *Dialogus*, xiv (see note 3).

<sup>94</sup> Bartlett, *England under the Norman*, 150 (see note 92). For more on the roles of sheriffs in medieval England, see William Alfred Morris, *The Medieval English Sheriff to 1300* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1927). For an analysis of twelfth-century popular opinions of sheriffs, see Emilie Amt, "The Reputation of the Sheriff, 1100–1216," *The Haskins Society Journal* 8 (1999), 91–98.

be; or perhaps he was simply too close to the events to notice the impact.<sup>95</sup> In fact, many of the sheriffs or their family members were later restored to office.<sup>96</sup> But this still must have served as a powerful reminder to officials that when they attempt to become unaccountable to the Exchequer, when they break the rules instead of just bending them, the structure of the game breaks down. The office of sheriff was both expensive and profitable,<sup>97</sup> and it was necessary to remind the sheriffs that the sums involved in the game of the Exchequer were not the only ones at stake. As Richard reminds his readers at the beginning of his text, if everyone plays by the rules, everyone will profit.<sup>98</sup>

Despite Richard's descriptiveness, however, the reader cannot help but get the impression that he is not telling us everything. He even makes this explicit at the end the Dialogue, when the disciple asks the master to explain the Exchequer's "den of mysteries" [*sacramentorum latibula*], which he mentioned earlier.<sup>99</sup> Richard responds: "Your question is vast and would need a separate inquiry, and I didn't promise to explain such things."<sup>100</sup> As illustrative as his work is, Richard does not give away all the tricks of the trade. The audience, whoever they may have been,<sup>101</sup> was told what they needed to know—the process of audit should be thought of as a chess match in which the rules could

<sup>95</sup> The prevailing view is perhaps best expressed by W. L. Warren: "It was a turning point in the history of the office: thereafter the sheriff's capacity to act at his own discretion was to be steadily restricted, and instead of being a virtually autonomous governor of a county he was to become the local agent of a centralized administration which watched him closely." *The Governance of Norman and Angevin England 1086–1272*. Governance of England, 2 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 112. For a convincing argument that the events of 1170 were not as exceptional as historians have argued, see Julia Boorman, "The Sheriffs of Henry II and the Significance of 1170," *Law and Government in Medieval England and Normandy: Essays in Honor of Sir James Holt*, ed. George Garnett and John Hudson (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 255–75.

<sup>96</sup> Only two of the dismissed sheriffs were reinstated, but relatives took over in all but three of the contested shrievalties (Boorman, "The Sheriffs of Henry II," 257–58 and 268–74 [see note 95]).

<sup>97</sup> Morris, *Medieval English Sheriff*, 114 (see note 94); Bartlett, *England under the Norman*, 150 (see note 92); Kealey, *Roger of Salisbury*, 50 (see note 20); Amt, Dialogue, xxiii (see note 3).

<sup>98</sup> "...if its procedures are followed in all matters, everyone's rights can be safeguarded..." (*...cuius ratio si seruetur in omnibus, poterunt singulis sua iura seruari...*) (Amt, Dialogue, 4–5 [see note 3]).

<sup>99</sup> Amt, Dialogue, 38, 190 (see note 3).

<sup>100</sup> "Magnum est quod queris et alterius egens inquisitionis, nec his exponendis ex promisso debitor tibi factus sum" (Amt, Dialogue, 190–1 [see note 3]).

<sup>101</sup> It has often been assumed that because most of the sheriffs were laymen, they were also illiterate; but Richardson and Sayles convincingly argue that many of the sheriffs might very well have known Latin (Richardson and Sayles, 281–82). Clanchy also argues that some medieval English knights had "pragmatic literacy," i.e. knew enough Latin to engage the written instruments of governance (Clanchy, *Memory*, 246–52). For more on lay literacy at this time, see Ralph V. Turner, "The *Miles Literatus* in Twelfth and Thirteenth-Century England: How Rare a Phenomenon?" *American Historical Review* 83 (1978), 928–45.

be more or less strictly enforced depending on the sheriffs' willingness to cooperate. Richard's text is a rulebook to teach his readers how to play the game, not how to win it. To give away all the mysteries of the Exchequer would undermine Richard's position, both in relation to the sheriffs and in relation to the king; for Richard was not only a representative of the king but also, in a sense, an opponent of the king who would also have to assume the role of the sheriff and account for himself.<sup>102</sup> To see him as a faceless, nameless bureaucrat—a cog in an administrative machine—would be a mistake.

It is for this reason that this essay has analyzed the Exchequer as a game instead of the machine many others have taken it to be. Viewing the Exchequer as a machine is too deterministic, projecting the specter of twentieth-century bureaucracy back into a twelfth century in which it did not exist. As much as Richard demonstrates the efficiency of the Exchequer, he certainly does not consider it a machine. What machine existed in the twelfth century that could possibly compare to the complexities of the Exchequer?<sup>103</sup> In Richard's opinion

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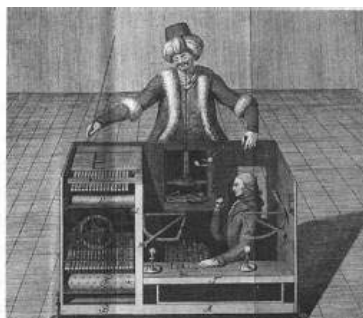
<sup>102</sup> In his otherwise excellent analysis of the Dialogue, Peter Haidu fails to take into account these multiple games at play between the king and his agents and so argues that Richard employs chess imagery "with false pretenses":

In chess, white and black are equal forces, differentiated only by the advantage of the first move. The allegory implies equality between the two primary participants, the treasurer and the sheriff. In fact, the superiority of one player, the subordination of the other infuses the entire procedure. An agonistic narrative is constructed and performed under false pretenses...as the text specifies. The sheriff is not the king's equal, who might beat the monarch by playing the game shrewdly enough: he is the king's agent, called to account, and the only question is whether he has obeyed the rules established by the king for the king's profit in order to produce the king's wealth (Haidu, *Subject Medieval/Modern*, 185–86 [see note 5]).

While it is true that the sheriff was at a disadvantage in relation to the treasurer and the treasurer was at a disadvantage in relation to the king, as demonstrated above, effective medieval administration necessitated flexibility and forgiveness, because royal power depended upon the localized power of royal administrators. Earlier in his analysis Haidu makes this very point when he notes that "making present the powers of an absent king demonstrates the separability of king and power" (Haidu, *Subject Medieval/Modern*, 183 [see note 5]).

<sup>103</sup> There were, of course, many remarkable machines in twelfth-century Europe. For examples, see Frances and Joseph Gies, *Cathedral, Forge, and Waterwheel: Technology and Invention in the Middle Ages* (New York: Harper, 1994). The mechanical arts were regarded as a subject worthy of study by some important medieval intellectuals: see Elspeth Whitney, "Paradise Restored: The Mechanical Arts from Antiquity through the Thirteenth Century," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* ns 80 no. 1 (1990), 1–169. Hugh of St Victor (1096–1141) even considered the arts of entertainment one of the seven mechanical arts he outlined in his *Didascalicon*, which would in effect make chess a mechanical art. See *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor. *Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies*, 64 (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1961), 74–79. But if we look at the other "mechanical arts" outlined by Hugh, we notice that all of them—fabric making, armaments, commerce, agriculture, hunting, medicine, and theatrics—relied on people. These were not the automata that so captivated later theorists of the state. As Scott Lightsey points out in an excellent study of late medieval automata, "As early as the twelfth

the only thing comparable was the game of chess, a game of strategy played between himself and the sheriffs, upon the outcome of which (in his opinion) the entire kingdom depended. The stakes were high and demanded a skilled player, not merely a rulebook. To view the twelfth-century Exchequer as a machine is to be deceived by the Turk, the chess-playing “machine” which delighted audiences in Europe at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>104</sup> An administrative manual is no substitute for an able administrator, just as the Turk without the expert chess player inside was nothing but an empty shell.



Wolfgang von Kempelen's Chess Automaton<sup>105</sup>

century, the material production of *mirabilia* was imagined on paper, but rarely realized. [...] Only later, in the fourteenth century, do we see an explosion of manufactured examples of the wonders of romance circulating as objects." *Manufactured Marvels in Medieval Culture and Literature*. New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 8 and 10. For twelfth-century examples of these literary automata, see E. R. Truitt, "Trei poëte, sages dotors, qui mout sorent di nigromance': Knowledge and Automata in Twelfth-Century French Literature," *Configurations* 12 (2004), 167–93.

<sup>104</sup> For an engaging history of the Turk, automata, and the relationship between chess and artificial intelligence, see Tom Standage, *The Turk: The Life and Times of the Famous Eighteenth-Century Chess-Playing Machine* (New York: Walker, 2002). Although the original Turk was destroyed over 150 years ago, a working model can be seen today at the Heinz Nixdorf Museum in Paderborn, which built it in 2004 to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of its creator, Wolfgang von Kempelen: [http://en.hnf.de/permanent\\_exhibition/1st\\_floor/the\\_mechanization\\_of\\_information\\_technology/t\\_chess\\_turk\\_has\\_been\\_brought\\_back\\_to\\_life.asp](http://en.hnf.de/permanent_exhibition/1st_floor/the_mechanization_of_information_technology/t_chess_turk_has_been_brought_back_to_life.asp) (last accessed March 15, 2011).

<sup>105</sup> Illustration in Freiherr Joseph Friedrich zu Racknitz, *Über den Schachspieler des Herrn von Kempelen, Leipzig 1789*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann\\_Nepomuk\\_M%C3%A4lzel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Nepomuk_M%C3%A4lzel) (last accessed March 15, 2011).

## Chapter 4

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### Defeating the Devil at Chess: A Struggle between Virtue and Vice in *Le Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé*

That the *Quaedam moralitas de scaccario* and Cessolis's *Liber de moribus hominum* had enormous popularity is a well-known fact.<sup>1</sup> More surprising, perhaps, is that their influence extended into the fifteenth-century. *Le jeu des esches de la dame moralisé* is one of the latest examples of the chess morality and unlike other texts in the tradition, is based on the modern game of chess. It appears in a single manuscript in the British Museum (Ms. Add. 15820) and dates from the end of the fifteenth-century.<sup>2</sup> H. J. R. Murray is the only one to have examined the work in some detail at the turn of the century.<sup>3</sup> As a scholar whose desire was to trace how the modern game of chess evolved from its Persian roots, Murray found this particular chess morality to be somewhat irritating because of the author's distracting allegorical methods. After

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<sup>1</sup> All further references to the *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium* will be abbreviated as Cessolis's *Liber*. Although the attribution of the *Quaedam moralitas de scaccario* to Pope Innocent III is erroneous, Murray dubbed it the "Innocent Morality." Lynn Thorndike refers to it by a translation of its opening clause "All the World's a Chess-Board" in his article of the same title "All the World's a Chess-board," *Speculum* 6.3 (Jul, 1931): 461–65. Jenny Adams refers to it as the *Quaedam* in *Power Play: the literature and politics of chess in the Late Middle Ages*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 43. Finding none of these titles satisfactory, I will associate the work with its supposed author. All further references to the *Quaedam moralitas de scaccario* will therefore read: Wales's morality.

<sup>2</sup> H. J. R. Murray explains that this is the only morality based on the game of modern chess, a game "which came into prominence in the closing years of the fifteenth century" ("An Early Work of Modern Chess," *The British Chess Magazine* 29 (1909): 283–87; here 283. For this reason, one must conclude that the work could not have been composed any earlier.

<sup>3</sup> He gives a detailed discussion of the work in the article listed above. He also discusses the work in his *A History of Chess* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913), 558 and 780–81.

explaining each chess move and what it symbolizes, the author, using an encyclopedic technique, enumerates a great many *exempla* in support of the moral symbolism. Since Murray was concerned with what the work revealed about the historical game itself, his discussion of the work only briefly touched on the nature of the allegory and the relationship of this allegory to other works in the tradition. It is precisely these topics which I propose to examine in this article. As a work composed at the end of the Middle Ages,<sup>4</sup> this morality reflects the great influence of those which preceded it. Murray briefly describes its relationship to other moralities saying that it “is written upon the model of the moralities of the older chess” and that “the plan is to describe a game in detail on the lines of *Les Eschez amoureux*, but the allegory is now religious.”<sup>5</sup> I would suggest that while accurate, this statement essentially veils the fact that there are two different models or traditions at work and that the *Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé* is a product of both of these.

It is somewhat difficult to talk about the “chess morality” since there has been neither a real discussion of what exactly characterizes this type of literature nor a comprehensive discussion of the works that merit the name.<sup>6</sup> Murray loosely defines the chess morality as a text “devoted. . . to the allegorical explanation of chess, generally on the broad line that the game was emblematic of the social condition of the time.”<sup>7</sup> Yet in his chapter on chess moralities, Murray seems to have interpreted the “social condition” in much broader terms since he includes texts with a religious and love theme as well. He includes certain works such as the *Echecs amoureux* in which the chess match allegorically represents the process by which the man falls in love with the woman, and others which use the allegory to describe man’s religious plight in the world. Furthermore, it is difficult to establish what precisely he understood to characterize this type of literature since Murray does not claim to be thorough in his treatment of chess moralities and the forms in which they appear are varied. Certain stand on their own and may be as brief as 48 verses, such as the Anglo-French poem in an Oxford manuscript (Ms. Corpus Christi College, 293, f. 142b)<sup>8</sup> while others are a part of a much larger narrative as in the case of the *Echecs amoureux* or the *Songe du Vieil Pelerin*. Should one give this

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<sup>4</sup> Very little is known about the origin of the *Jeu*. I will offer some hypotheses in a future edition of the *Jeu*.

<sup>5</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 558 (see note 3).

<sup>6</sup> Jenny Adams talks about certain works of the chess morality tradition in *Power Play* (see note 1). She describes these works as “chess allegories.” Since the game of chess, however, is used in many genres of medieval literature as a simple allegorical image and must be differentiated from works in which the description of the chess game is intended to teach a moral lesson, I believe that Murray’s description of the works as “chess moralities” is more appropriate..

<sup>7</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 529 (see note 3).

<sup>8</sup> Östen Södergård, ed. “Petit poème allégorique sur les échecs,” *Studia Neophilologica* 23 (1950–51) 127–36.

label of chess morality to a poem that interprets the game allegorically but does not offer a complete analysis of the various chess pieces, such as the *Miracles de Nostre Dame* in which the focus is the role of the queen, or the *Echecs amoureux* in which the allegorical meaning is derived primarily from the chess play and no allegorical explanation of the chess pieces themselves is given?<sup>9</sup>

While I cannot specifically discuss in the body of this article what constitutes the genre, the ambiguity of its definition must be acknowledged before proceeding with my analysis. For the sake of this argument, let me suggest that there are at least two different types of chess moralities. I will refer to the first type as the static chess morality. By this I mean works such as Wales's morality, Cessolis's *Liber*, and translations of the *Liber*. Works such as the *Songe du Vieil Pelerin* also contain this type of morality. These works focus on an allegorization of the various ranks of the chess players and/or the chessboard, making no differentiation between black and white pieces and no reference to specific moves made by individual chess pieces.<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that they do not allegorize the abilities of the pieces to move or suggest potential moves, however. They simply do not focus on specific moves made in an actual match. On the other hand, there are chess moralities in which there is a game played, to which I will refer as active chess moralities. These moralities are a part of the broader literary tradition in which poor chess play is used to symbolize a loss of reason on the part of one of the players. Not all of the chess moralities specifically allegorize the chess pieces or their abilities to move, but they do all contain a chess match, the end of which does have allegorical meaning.<sup>11</sup> There are a number of active chess moralities with a religious bent that fit into this category such as the Anglo-French poem in the Corpus Christi manuscript and works with no religious significance whatsoever such as the *Echecs amoureux*. The *Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé*, written much later than these other chess moralities, seems to be a product of both of these traditions—of the static chess morality and of the larger tradition associating loss at chess with sin by way of

<sup>9</sup> Murray does not classify the *Miracles de Nostre Dame* as a chess morality. In mentioning it here, I merely intend to highlight one of the difficulties in defining the genre.

<sup>10</sup> The closest that any of these works comes to allegorizing a specific move may be found in Wales's morality in which the final moves—that is, check and checkmate—of any potential match between a sinner and the devil are allegorized. I make specific reference to this passage below.

<sup>11</sup> The association of chess with unreasonable behavior is most prominent in the love chess motif in which a man and a woman play a game of chess and one loses the game to the other because s/he is distracted by his or her growing love for the other player. Loss at the game represents a loss of reason and in many cases is used to highlight sinful behavior. The active chess moralities function in a very similar way but focus on a distraction caused by vice or temptation. See Kristin Juel, "Chess, Love, and the Rhetoric of Distraction in Medieval French Narrative," *Romance Philology* 64 (Spring, 2010) 73-97. I will explain this point in more detail later in the article.

the active chess morality. The *Jeu* uses allegorical imagery and techniques present in Wales's and Cessolis's moralities. On the other hand, it has an allegorical structure that bears the influence of the *Echecs amoureux*. *Le Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé* blends the two different traditions to produce an interesting and creative piece which demonstrates the enormous popularity of this type of composition.

Before beginning an analysis of this work's allegorical ancestry, it will be helpful to give a brief summary. The work begins with a dedication to a lady of the nobility and an explanation of the title. The board represents the World. Each letter of the French word for "world" —M-U-N-D-E—represents a certain negative characteristic about the world and is described with detailed examples. *N* stands for *nuisible* (harmful), for example, and the narrator describes how every aspect of the world may harm us by leading us away from a virtuous path. Just as the board represents the world, the pieces represent people of the various estates while they stand on the board. At the end of the game, however, all of the pieces are swept into the bag where pawns lie above kings; in death rank means nothing.

A chess match is played between a lady and the devil. The stake of the game is the lady's soul. The devil's pieces are black and represent various temptations of the world and sins whereas the lady's pieces are white and represent various good personality traits and virtues (see Fig. 1). The devil's pieces are thus named: the king, *orgueil* (pride), the queen, *ambition*, the bishops, *volupté* (sensual pleasure) and *hypocrisie*, the knights, *discorde* and *mensonge* (a lie), the rooks, *murmure* (grumbling) and *faulceté* (falseness), and the pawns, *blasphème* (blasphemy), *détraction* (slander), *inconstance* (inconstancy), *amour de soy* (love of self), *fiction*, *curiosité* (curiosity), *parjure* (perjury), and *trahison* (treason). The lady's pieces: the king, *charité* (charity); the queen, *humilité* (humility); the bishops, *honesteté* (honesty) and *cognoissance de soy-mesme* (knowledge of self); the knights, *vray amytié* (true friendship) and *vérité* (truth); the rooks, *patience* and *loyauté* (loyalty); the pawns, *temperance*, *benivolence*, *dévotion*, *amour de Dieu* (love of God), *continence*, *constance* (constancy), *fidélité* (fidelity) and one unnamed pawn.

The chess match is described in such detail that each move save one can be played out on the board. The game begins with the devil moving forward his pawn called *amour de soy-mesme* (love of self) and the lady moving forward her pawn *amour de Dieu* (love of God) in response. For the most part, each move is the subject of a chapter in which the move is interpreted allegorically in order to demonstrate the power of a particular sin or virtue. Numerous Biblical and classical examples are given in support of each move that is allegorized. The game is resolved in sixteen



moves with the lady putting the devil's king in check with her queen, *humilité* (humility) and mating it with her pawn, *amour de Dieu* (love of God).<sup>12</sup>

### Devil

<u>R</u> Murmure	<u>Kt</u> Discorde	<u>B</u> Volupté	<u>Ki</u> Orgueil	<u>Q</u> Ambition	<u>B</u> Ypocrisie	<u>Kt</u> Mensonge	<u>R</u> Faulceté
<u>P</u> BlaspHEME	<u>P</u> Detraction	<u>P</u> Inconstance	<u>P</u> Amour de soy	<u>P</u> Fiction	<u>P</u> Curiosité	<u>P</u> Parjure	<u>P</u> Trahison
<u>P</u> Temperance	<u>P</u> Benivolence	<u>P</u> Devotion	<u>P</u> Amour de Dieu	<u>P</u> Contenance	<u>P</u> [unnamed]	<u>P</u> Constance	<u>P</u> Fidelité
<u>R</u> Patience	<u>Kt</u> Vray amytié	<u>B</u> Honnesteté	<u>Ki</u> Charité	<u>Q</u> Humilité	<u>B</u> Cognoissance de soy-mesmes	<u>Kt</u> Verité	<u>R</u> Loyauté

### Lady<sup>13</sup>

Fig. 1. Initial positions of chess pieces in the *Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé*

<sup>12</sup> As I will discuss later, Murray describes the quality of the chess moves as incredibly poor and at times, impossible.

<sup>13</sup> Finding Murray's translation of the names to be perfectly adequate, I have adopted them here. See Murray, "An Early Work of Modern Chess," 285 (see note 2).

## Influence of the Static Chess Moralities

In its use of imagery and its allegorical technique, the *Jeu* reflects the influence of two static chess moralities—the *Quaedam moralitas de scaccario*, attributed to John of Wales, and Cessolis's *Liber de moribus hominum*. First, the opening chapter of the *Jeu* makes obvious use of the imagery central to Wales's morality; the board represents the world and the pieces on the board represent the people of the various estates.<sup>14</sup> Although the pieces are organized in a certain fashion on the board during the game according to their rank, the placement of the pieces in the bag at the end of the game symbolizes the fact that one's rank in the world loses all meaning in death and bears no importance in the afterlife.

Second, the allegorical meaning of the chess match in the *Jeu* seems to be a development of the ending of the Wales's morality. The ending of Wales's work reads thus:

In isto autem ludo diabolus dicit *eschek*, insultando vel percuciendo aliquem peccati iaculo qui (sit) percussus nisi cicius dicat *liqueret*, ad penitenciam et cordis compunctioni transeundo, diabolus dicit ei *Mat*, animam secum ad tartara deducendo, vbi non liberabitur, nec prece, nec pretio, quia in inferno nulla est redemptio. [7 other manuscripts continue:] Et sicut venator diuersos habet canes ad diuersas carnes (bestias) capiendas, sic diabolus et mundus diuersa habent peccata quibus diuersemodo homines illaqueant, quia omne quod est in mundo vel est concupiscentia carnis, vel concupiscentia oculorum vel uite superbia.<sup>15</sup>

[In this game the devil says "Check," insulting or shooting with the dart of sin one to whom, unless he readily says "Check covered"<sup>16</sup> by passing to repentance and remorse of heart, the devil says "Checkmate," taking his soul down to Tartarus, whence he would not be released neither by prayer, nor for any price, for in hell there is no redemption. And just like the hunter uses different hounds to catch different game, so the devil and the world have different sins with which to ensnare men in different ways, for all that is in the world is either concupiscence of the flesh or concupiscence of the eyes or pride of life.]<sup>17</sup>

As we have seen, the chess match in the *Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé* relates the temptation of the lady by the devil. A potential loss of the game on the part of the lady represents her giving in to sin and going to hell. On the other hand,

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<sup>14</sup> This image is also used in what was the more popular morality, Cessolis' *Liber*.

<sup>15</sup> I make reference to the text provided by Murray, *A History of Chess*, 561 (see note 3). He consults over ten different manuscripts in constructing the text. I have omitted the variants in order to facilitate reading of the passage. Since I have not consulted all of these manuscripts myself, I have reproduced his text with its inconsistencies.

<sup>16</sup> According to Murray, this is the only occurrence of the Old French technicality for "covered check." In Middle English versions of this work (and in translations of those versions), the term for this is "Neck." See Murray, *A History of Chess*, 533–34 (see note 3).

<sup>17</sup> All translations given in this article are my own.

her victory demonstrates that she has resisted sin and thereby gained salvation. This certainly bears a striking resemblance to the above passage in which the man's loss is equated to his being conquered by the devil while his defensive play symbolizes his resistance to sin. Moreover, each of the devil's pieces in the *Jeu* represents a certain sin or temptation, a possible development of the final sentence above in which the author explains that the devil has many kinds of temptations to catch people.

In terms of allegorical style and technique, the *Jeu* bears the influence of Cessolis's *Liber*. First, it has the same objective—to give advice. Although Wales's morality highlights the occurrence of both sinful and virtuous behavior,<sup>18</sup> this is not at all the case for Cessolis's *Liber*, in which Cessolis outlines what character traits and virtues are necessary amongst the various members of society in order for it to function well. It discusses the role of each member of society and gives helpful tips as to how each member should behave. Within the fiction of the *Liber*, all of this advice is intended to correct the wicked king of his evil ways and ultimately does so. While the topic and delivery of advice is entirely different, the *Jeu* has this same intention. The goal is to teach the reader (in this case, the lady) what virtues and positive character traits she will need in order to resist sin in this world.<sup>19</sup> The fiction of the work is not the story of the game's invention for the correction of the king, but of a specific game played between the lady and the devil. The advice comes presumably from someone on the sidelines, a narrator who reminds us on a regular basis of his presence by giving the lady specific advice about how to move. He explains that each move will be allegorized for a specific reason:

Pour l'accomplissement de ce petit livre nous ferons de chacun tant du roy que des pions un petit chapitre pour et à celle fin de si bien vous guider que en bien le lisant et gracieusement le goustant... nous puissions parvenir à beatitude eternelle. [fol. 2v]

In writing this little book, we will write a little chapter about each—from the king to the pawns—a little chapter, in order to guide you so well that by reading it carefully and in enjoying it graciously... we may arrive at eternal bliss.

<sup>18</sup> "Of the pieces described, only two exhibit virtue: the king and the rook," Jenny Adams, *Power Play*, 44 (see note 1). Although it is true that Wales's work interprets certain moves (those made at a diagonal) in a negative sense, I would argue that it does suggest the potential for goodness. Jenny Adams does not interpret the knight's straight move (symbolizing his legal power for collecting rents) or the pawns straight move except when taking a piece (symbolizing that he does well as long as he keeps from ambition) as positive.

<sup>19</sup> While the *Acteur* in the *Echecs amoureux* was distracted from the chess match on numerous occasions and unable to think of how to move, something which results in his falling prey to his desire for the woman, the narrator of the *Jeu* would never allow the lady's attention to waver, for he is never absent from the narrative. For further analysis of this scene along similar lines of argumentation, see Daniel E. O'Sullivan's essay, "Changing of Rules in and of Medieval European Chess Allegory," in this volume.

Unlike the king in Cessolis's *Liber*, the lady will not learn about the workings of various professions in the course of the allegory; rather, she will learn how to keep away from temptation and thereby attain salvation. Nonetheless, the goal of the allegory is advisory; it is intended to offer a lesson for the improvement of the listener.

The *Jeu* also follows the pattern of the *Liber* in that the narrator uses *exempla*, the moral teaching device so popular during the course of the Middle Ages, in giving his advice.<sup>20</sup> He says in reference to one particular move:

Parquoy je suis d'opinion que debves prandre sa dame ambition de vostre pion de benivolence en ensuyvant les glorieulx saintcz et saintes tant apostres martirs et confesseurs que vierges qui ont surmonté par bonté et benignité les ambicieulx tyrans orgueilleux et puissans.

...

Regardes Sainte Katherine. Ne tient-elle pas Maxence soubz ses pieds? Regardez Saint Vincent qui dist à Decius empereur, "Je puis plus souffrir pour l'onneur de Dieu que tu ne me scauroys tormenter ne travailler." [fol. 16v]

[For this reason, I am of the opinion that you should take his queen, ambition, with your pawn, benevolence, in following [the example of] the glorious saints, apostles, martyrs, confessors and virgins who surmounted the ambitious, proud and powerful tyrants by means of their goodness and kindness.

...

Look at Saint Katherine. Didn't she keep Maxentius under her feet? Look at Saint Vincent who said to Emperor Decius, "I can suffer more for the honor of God than you would know how to torment or pain me."]

Despite the direct address to the lady, a technique not found in the *Liber*, the procedure is the same. The author takes examples from Biblical and classical works and uses them to demonstrate great virtue in some cases such as those mentioned above, and in others terrible depravity. Having ample knowledge of such stories, the narrator uses a great number in support of each of his points. While Cessolis seems satisfied with 2–3 brief examples, the author of the *Jeu* prefers a more encyclopedic approach and on occasion gives several folios full of *exempla* in support of one statement. Although this enumeration is not a writing style that is particularly appreciated by a modern audience, it was an incredibly popular teaching tool at the time.

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<sup>20</sup> For discussions of how Cessolis's *Liber* uses *exempla*, see Jean-Michel Mehl, "L'Exemplum chez Jacques de Cessoles," *Le Moyen Age* 84 (1978): 227–46; J.-Th. Welter, *L'exemplum dans la littérature religieuse et didactique du moyen âge* (Paris, 1927): 351–54; Raymond D. Di Lorenzo "The Collection Form and the Art of Memory in the *Libellus Super Ludo Schachorum* of Jacobus de Cessolis," *Mediaeval Studies* 35 (1973): 205–21; and Dario Del Puppo's "The Limits of Allegory in Jacobus de Cessolis' *De ludo scaccorum*" in this volume.

## Lady

		<u>B</u> Franchise		<u>Ki</u> Li coers amoureux ou li coraiges	<u>B</u> Pités		
		<u>R</u> Douls Regart	<u>Kt</u> Honte	<u>Kt</u> Pàour	<u>R</u> Bel Acoeil		
<u>P</u> Jonesche	<u>P</u> Biautés	<u>P</u> Simplesche	<u>P</u> Doulz Semblant <u>Q</u> Maniere	<u>P</u> Faiticetés	<u>P</u> Sens	<u>P</u> Bontés	<u>P</u> Noblesche
<u>P</u> Oyseuse	<u>P</u> Regars	<u>P</u> Dous Pensers	<u>Q</u> Plaisanche <u>P</u> Delis	<u>P</u> Doubte de falir	<u>P</u> Souvenir	<u>P</u> Biau Maintien	<u>P</u> Bien Celer
		<u>R</u> Perseveranche	<u>Kt</u> Hardement	<u>Kt</u> Douls Parler	<u>R</u> Pacience		
		<u>B</u> Espoir		<u>Ki</u> Li coers amoureux ou li coraiges	<u>B</u> Desirs		

## Acteur

Fig. 2. The initial chessboard set-up in the *Echecs amoureux*

Finally, the *Jeu* uses similar allegorical techniques to those used in Cessolis's *Liber*. At first glance, of course, the naming of the chess pieces in the *Jeu* seems to have more in common with the *Echecs amoureux*. After all, each piece has its own individual name, independent of its rank on the chessboard. Moreover, there are two different sets of pieces, one belonging to the *Acteur* and the other to the Lady. Each of the *Acteur's* pieces represents a certain part of the process

of his falling in love with the woman (see Fig. 2). *Regars* (Look) represents the first moment that he catches sight of her and becomes wounded by her beauty, while his pawn called *Doubte de falir* (fear of failure) represents that or those moments when he begins to doubt that he will succeed at winning her heart. On the other hand, each of her pieces represents a certain quality or character trait which affects him and causes him to fall in love with her. The pawn called *Jonesche* (Youth) obviously suggests that she is young, while *Douls Regart* (Sweet Look) represents one of her weapons in the game of love. Certainly the man is wounded by such a piece in the process of falling in love. The *Jeu*'s situation is also built around the idea of opposing forces, the devil's pieces representing various temptations and sins while the lady's pieces represent virtues and positive character traits that she may use against the devil in the match.

But if one considers the nature of these pieces, one can see that they seem closer in philosophy to Cessolis's *Liber*. The woman's pieces represent virtues or qualities—love of God, humility, truth, patience, devotion—that are essential to the human being if she is to succeed in the Christian world. In looking at the initial layout of the pieces [see Fig. 1 above], we can see that the devil's pieces are paired almost exactly as opposites with the lady's pieces. The queen's knights are "a lie" and "truth," the king's pawns are "self-love" and "love of God." One represents the ideal and the other, the sin which must be avoided at all costs. This is not at all the case in the *Echecs*. If we look at various pairs of opposing ranked pieces in the *Echecs* such as her rook Sweet Look and his, Perseverance, or her knight called Fear and his, Sweet Look, we see that the relationship between pieces is much more abstract. In Cessolis's *Liber*, on the other hand, the thrust of the allegory is moral; it is the behavior of each individual in society that is in question. The *Liber* focuses on those qualities and virtues which are essential to the various ranks in order for those individuals to function well in society. While the *Liber* is certainly more specific than the *Jeu* in that it highlights particular virtues important for the various ranks and does not dwell on the negative possibilities, the underlying moral construct is similar. The goal of both texts is to encourage virtue and avoid sin.

Second, there is a certain similarity between the *Jeu* and the static chess moralities in the way the moves—the specific moves in the *Jeu* and the potential moves in the static chess moralities—are allegorized. As stated earlier, the chess moves in the static chess moralities tend to be allegorized in the abstract since the focus of the morality is not an actual chess match. We see, for example, that the chess moves acquire symbolic meaning through an analysis of the direction that they take on the board. In Wales's morality, for example, a straight chess move symbolizes virtuous behavior while an oblique move designates immoral behavior. The pawn's move is described as straight, except when it takes another piece. This suggests that the poor man does well as long as he can

resist ambition.<sup>21</sup> In Cessolis's *Liber*, there is a similar approach to analyzing the chess move. Here, however, it is based on number. In Ferron's translation of the *Liber*,<sup>22</sup> he explains that the king cannot cross the third row (the row in front of the pawns) in its first move and allegorizes it as follows:<sup>23</sup>

... le nombre de.III. contient toutes les parties qui font le premier nombre parfet qui est.VI., car.III. contient.I.,.II.,.III. que se on les joingnoit ensemble il font.VI. qui est le premier nombre parfet et ce nombre represente.VI. persounes qui representent la perfection du royaume, c'est assavoir le roy, la royne, les juges, les chevaliers, les vicaires et le commun pueple.<sup>24</sup>

[The number three contains all of the parts which make up the perfect number, that is the number six, because [the number] three contains [the numbers] one, two, and three, which make six, the first perfect number, and this number symbolizes the six [types of] people who represent the perfection of the kingdom, that is the king, the queen, the judges, the knights, the vicars and the common people.]

Thus it is by means of an interesting mathematical analysis of the rule that the move comes to take on allegorical significance.

We see a similar technique in the *Jeu*. In this case, however, it is not used to analyze the pieces's abilities in the abstract, but rather, a specific chess move. At one point, the chess queen, named Humility, moves four spaces, as shown in Fig. 3.

... Dame Humilité se vient de siege en siege jusques au quart dont le premier est mespriser le monde et la pompe de ce siecle. Le second est ne mespriser aulcun. Le tiers est mespriser soy mesmes. Le quatriesme est mespriser estre mesprisé. Et quant on vient jusques au quatriesme siege, on donne eschec au roy d'orgueil. (fol. 44v)

[The queen Humility moves from square to square until the fourth, of which the first (square) is to disdain the world and the pomp of this day. The second is to never hold anyone in disdain. The third is to disdain oneself. The fourth is to disdain being disdained. And when one comes to the fourth square, one puts the king of pride in check.]

The move takes on meaning because of the number of spaces included in the move. Each space represents one component of humility. The fourth characteristic, that one should ignore all insults and afflictions, is viewed as the most important and the last because, in the opinion of the author, many people can do the other three but few are capable of the fourth. One can see that this

<sup>21</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 560–61 (see note 3).

<sup>22</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *Le jeu des échaz moralisé: Traduction de Jean Ferron (1347)*, ed. Alain Collet. Classiques français du Moyen Age, 134. (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> According to Murray, Cessolis's morality reflects the initial move of the king in Lombard chess (Murray, *A History of Chess*, 461–62 [see note 3]).

<sup>24</sup> Cessolis, *Le jeu des échaz...Ferron*, 199 (see note 22).

particular method of allegorizing the chess move has much in common with the methods seen in Wales's and Cessolis's moralities, for the meaning comes not from the interaction between various pieces, but from an analysis of the physical movement of the piece on the board itself.

### Devil

<u>R</u> Murmure			<u>Ki</u> Orgueil		Q Humilité	<u>Kt</u> Mensonge	<u>R</u> Faulceté
<u>P</u> BlaspHEME	<u>P</u> Detraction	<u>P</u> Inconstance		↗	<u>P</u> Curiosité	<u>P</u> Parjure	<u>P</u> Trahison
		<u>Kt</u> Discorde	↗	<u>P</u> Fiction			
		↗	<u>P</u> Amour de soy		P Contenance		
P Benivolence	[Q seated here]		P Amour de Dieu				
P Temper- ance		P Devotion			P [unnamed]	P Constance	P Fidelité
R Patience	Kt Vray amytié	B Honnesteté	Ki Charité		B Cognois- sance de soy- mesmes	Kt Verité	R Voyauté

### Lady

Fig. 3. Move of the Lady's queen in *Le Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé*

One of the more curious parts of this particular allegorization is that the piece also takes on meaning through its association with a square on the board. Since this fourth square on which queen Humility finally stops [see Fig. 4] was where the piece Hypocrisy started out at the beginning of the game [see Fig. 1 above], the allegorization of the move makes a link between the two pieces and



incorporates it into the explanation. The narrator explains that it is logical that this particular space on the board is the one on which Humility sits since hypocrites often feign the first three characteristics of humility but cannot feign the fourth. We see the pieces of Pride and Love of Self linked together in this same way. When the devil moves the king called Pride onto a square that the pawn Love of Self had been sitting on at a previous moment in the game, the narrator links the two explaining that it is when pride inflates our self-love that we are most in danger of being distracted from God. Although the pieces have no real relationship with each other in the course of the game, that is, neither poses a threat to the other, they are linked through a space on the board, a sort of imagined proximity between the two pieces. This leads us into another similarity between the *Jeu* and Cessolis's *Liber*: the pieces take on meaning in a way that does not figure into the chess match, but are linked them through their physical proximity to other pieces on the board.

Obviously, the situation is not the same, for there is no game played and there is no opposing set of chess pieces in Cessolis's *Liber*. Yet Cessolis does take into consideration the potential first moves of various pieces. As we can see in a discussion of Ferron's translation, the pieces are allegorized by a potential physical proximity to other pieces of the same side in their initial positions. In describing one of the bishops, for example, Ferron explains that its first move would place it (\*) in front of the pawn named "phisicien" or "laboureur" as one can see in Fig. 4.

[top end of board]

Roc	Chevalier	Alphin (juge)	Royne	Roy	Alphin (juge)	Chevalier	Roc
Ribaud	Garde	Tavernier	Phisicien	Marchant	Notaire	Fever	Laboureur
*				*			

Fig. 4. A diagram of a bishop's move in Ferron's text.

Ferron goes on to point out the significance of this:

. . . le senestre qui est blanc a.II. paires de sauls, l'un ou point blanc et vuit qui est devant le marchant et est la cause pour ce que marchans ont mestier de conseil et les juges doivent leurs noises finir se nuelles en ont.

L'autre si est ou point blanc vuit devans les ribaus. La cause si est car il se combattent souvent et emblent, et pour ce les juges les ont a punir.<sup>26</sup>

[. . . the one that is white has two possible moves, one to the white empty square that is in front of the merchant and the reason for this is that merchants have need of advice and judges must put an end to their quarrels if any have them.

The other is the white, empty space in front of the [piece representing] ribald peasants. The cause is because they fight often and steal, and for this judges have to punish them.]

These initial moves give the author the opportunity to explain relationships between the various social classes within society. Although neither of the pieces in question poses a threat to the other and there is no actual move being described, they are linked through a potential proximity of the two pieces on the board and are used to demonstrate the relationship of these groups of people in society. Therefore, while the *Jeu* does involve the players of two opposing forces, as it does in the *Echecs amoureux*, one must allow that at the allegorical meaning assigned to certain of the moves resembles that of Cessolis's morality. The pieces of one or both sides are linked to one another through their location on the board, but in a way that does not take into account the strategy of the match.

### The Active Chess Morality and the Association of Loss at Chess with Sin

The *Jeu* is very clearly a product of both traditions of the chess morality, the most obvious similarity between the *Jeu* and active chess moralities being that the entire chess allegory is built around an actual chess match. As I stated earlier, the author of the *Jeu* may have been inspired to build his allegory around a chess match by the final sentence in certain manuscripts of Wales's morality in which it states that the devil has many different temptations by which to trick the sinner. This particular premise, however, that one player loses as a result of temptation, appears in a number of types of works. These include works of the love chess motif like the *Echecs amoureux*, also considered to be a chess morality, chess moralities with a more specifically religious bent like the Anglo-French poem in Ms. Corpus Christi College, 293, and works such as *Floire et Blancheflor* and the *Miracles de Nostre Dame*, texts that are not

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<sup>26</sup> Cessolis, *Le jeu des échaz*...Ferron, 203 (see note 22).

traditionally considered a part of the chess morality tradition but that do allegorize a loss at chess as sin. In these works, one player is distracted from the game because of love or some other temptation/desire and loses as a result.<sup>27</sup> It is clear that this tradition influenced the *Jeu*, most likely through the *Echecs amoureux*, as I will explain below.

To begin, I must characterize the way in which these works associate loss at chess with sin.<sup>28</sup> In *Floire et Blancheflor* and the *Miracles de Nostre Dame*, the chess pieces do not themselves represent sin and virtue; rather the outcome or potential outcome of the game is blamed on sin or desire. In the case of *Floire et Blancheflor*, we do not see the temptation symbolized by a particular chess piece on the board, but rather represented by the cup wagered on the game.<sup>29</sup> When Blancheflor is taken by an emir and made to join his harem, Floire goes to find her. In order to gain access to her, he plays a number of games of chess against the porter. Floire lets the porter win a good deal of money, and finally wagers a cup on the match which the porter covets. It is at this point that Floire defeats him at the game. The man laments, and explains that he has been defeated as a result of his greed.

Engigniés sui, dist il, c'est voirs!  
 Deceü m'a li vostre avoires.  
 Par covoitise en ai le tort,  
 por vostre avoir avrai la mort. (vv. 2263–66)

[I have been tricked, he says, this is true! / Your wealth has deceived me. / Because of greed I have made an error, / because of your wealth I will have death.]

There is no allegory of chess pieces, but the man loses because he is distracted by wealth and greed and that game is used expressly to demonstrate this.

Another example of this can be found in the *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Here, we see a situation similar to that in the *Jeu* in which the man is forced to play a game against the devil.<sup>30</sup> In this particular game, the reason for the man's loss is not the wager made on the game, a literal temptation which distracts the man's attention from the game itself, but rather the devil's tricky chess play. The game does not go well for man, who would have no success at the game were it not for God intervening on our behalf:

<sup>27</sup> For more on the specific association of the love chess motif with chess moralities, including the *Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé*, see Juel, "Love, Chess, and the Rhetoric of Distraction," 87–95.

<sup>28</sup> I discuss this tradition at length, including these particular works, in a forthcoming article.

<sup>29</sup> Jean-Luc Leclanche, ed., *Le Conte de Floire et Blancheflor*. Classiques français du Moyen Age, 105 (Paris: Champion, 1980).

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed discussion of this chess match, see Steven M. Taylor, "God's Queen: Chess Imagery in the Poetry of Gautier de Coinci," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 17 (1990): 403–19.

Tant seit de boule li bouleres  
 Et tant par est fors tribouleres  
 Se nos n'avons qui no giu face,  
 Ja ne verrons Dieu en la face.  
 Tant seit de tors, tant seit de trais  
 Tost nos avra en l'angle trais,  
 Ou serons pris et mat . . . (vv. 201–07)

[The trickster knows so much about trickery / And is so very troublesome / [That] if we do not have someone who played the game for us / We will never see God's face. / He knows so many tricks, he knows so many moves / He will soon have us led into the corner / Where we will be taken and mated . . . ]

Here, there is an allegorical aspect to the game for it is the devil's tricky moves within the chess match itself which represent the temptations to which he subjects us. As flawed beings, we cannot resist the temptation of the devil and would all go to hell were it not for God's assistance. One can see that in both the case of the *Miracles de Nostre Dame* and *Floire et Blancheflor*, the loss at chess is blamed on temptation, either one found within or outside of the game.

While the *Echecs amoureux* is obviously a part of this tradition in that the man loses because he gives in to love and desire, losing his reason, it is also unique since it makes of the chess match a detailed allegory. Very much like the porter in *Floire et Blancheflor*, the *Acteur* in the *Echecs amoureux* is "blinded" to reason by the lady's beauty. This event leads to his eventual defeat in the game, symbolizing his complete submission to love. While love is viewed philosophically at the time as a state opposed to reason, his lack of reason is made all the more apparent by his plans to defeat her at a rematch so that he may "have her at his will." This process by which he is tempted and eventually gives in to love is highlighted at various points during the chess match.

As I pointed out in Fig. 2 above, each piece on the board has a specific name. The lady's pieces represent a particular quality, emotional response or character trait specific to her and the man's pieces represent his own. This chess match traces the development of the man's love for the woman, the final move in which she takes his king, *li coers amoreus*, symbolizing that he has fallen in love with her—she has his heart. As is popular in the tradition, love is viewed as a state antithetical to reasonable behavior. This is demonstrated through the man's behavior during the chess match as the man gradually succumbs to his desire for the woman over the course of the chess game.<sup>31</sup> The lady is, of course, the cause, and the temptation he feels to love her is made evident through the chess play. We see, for example, the *Acteur* lose his composure

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed description of this process, see Kristin E. Juel, "Loving the Creator and his Creations: Ethical reflections on the nature of love in the fourteenth-century *Echecs amoureux*," Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2002.

when taking a particular chess piece. At a certain point in the chess match between the *Acteur* and the lady, the *Acteur* takes the lady's pawn called *Biautés* (Beauty) with the bishop called *Desir*. On the shield of this chess piece called desire is a flame. This symbolizes that the man's desire is inflamed by the lady's beauty. Immediately following this move, the *Acteur* acts in a strange way:

Lors commençay je a regarder,  
 Je ne m'en peüsse garder,  
 Le pöonnet plain de confort  
 Et a considerer trop fort  
 L'excellence de sa figure  
 Et de sa matere tres pure,  
 Qui sur toute aultre iert precieuse.  
 En cheste pensee joyeuse  
 Estoit si m'entente ravie,  
 Que je cuit, qu'il n'a coer en vie,  
 Qui onques si parfondement  
 Appliquast son entendement  
 Ne qui si sa cure meist  
 A chose, qu'il onques veüst;  
 Si le souhaidoie estre miens,  
 Onques ne souhaiday tant riens,  
 Et finalement je l'eüsse,  
 Mais qu'estre repris n'en deüsse,  
 Volentiers o moy emporté,  
 Car che m'eüst moult conforté. (vv. 1425–44)<sup>32</sup>

[Then I began to look at, I could not keep myself from doing so, the pawn full of comfort and to contemplate much too deeply the excellence of its shape and of its very pure substance, which was more precious than any other. In this joyous thought my mind was so delighted, that I believe that there is not a person alive who has ever so deeply applied his sense to, nor who has put his desire [so entirely] on a thing that he saw; I wanted so much for it to be mine, never had I wanted anything so much, and would have taken it away with me, because this would have comforted me very much, but I did not want to be criticized.]

He grows distracted from the game by the chess piece itself and is so taken by its beauty that he thinks about making off with it, thus forgetting about the game entirely. His behavior thus highlights the allegorical interpretation of this move—that his desire has been inflamed by her beauty, so much so that he forgets how he ought to behave and considers carrying her off. This particular interaction between two pieces demonstrates that the man is gradually

<sup>32</sup> Christine Kraft, *Die Liebesgarten-Allegorie der "Echecs amoureux": kritische Ausgabe und Kommentar* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1977).

succumbing to temptation. As the *Acteur* gradually loses focus in the game, we are aware that he is progressively falling in love. There are a significant number of these types of chess moves throughout the match, the man playing more and more poorly, so that when he finally succumbs at the end and is mated, it is clear that he has entirely given in to his feelings of desire and fallen in love with the woman.

I would argue that the *Jeu* was influenced by this tradition of literature that associates loss at chess with sin, most likely by way of the *Echecs amoureux* since it shares so many similarities with it. Both of these chess moralities use the game of chess to demonstrate the dangers of temptation and sin on a much more detailed level.<sup>33</sup> Despite the great narrative differences between the *Jeu* and the *Echecs amoureux*, both are constructed around a real chess match, an element absent from the static chess moralities. In Cessolis's morality, the way in which the allegory is constructed results in a description that focuses only on how one should act, and not on how one should not. In the *Echecs* and the *Jeu*, however, there is the possibility for virtuous or sinful behavior and the struggle between temptation and reasonable behavior is played out on the board. Furthermore, nearly every move played during the course of the games can be played out on the chessboard.<sup>34</sup> In the *Echecs*, the chess play symbolizes the man's gradual loss of reason as he falls in love with the woman. In the *Jeu*, the chess play symbolizes the struggle of the woman to conquer sin by means of her virtue. Her defeat of the devil at the end is her ability to resist pride. Thus in structure, these allegories are similar in that the chess pieces of both players have individual value and the chess play itself comes to take on meaning. But it is perhaps the fact that the meaning of both allegories are based on this new association of the piece with its name and its actual role in the chess match which makes the link between these two works the most apparent.

In the *Jeu*, it is not only the ultimate outcome of the game that symbolizes a surrender to sin in general; every move made by the devil represents a particular temptation or sin while the lady's response to every move symbolizes her resistance to it. Just as in the *Echecs*, the moves made by the devil pose a particular threat to the lady. The chess moves, no longer in the abstract, take on symbolic value. The specific moral meaning—in this case, the particular threat

<sup>33</sup> As I briefly mentioned above, the *Echecs* and the *Jeu* have very little in common from a narrative point of view. After all, the *Echecs amoureux* is a romance, and one intended to function as a commentary on the *Roman de la Rose*. The chess game plays a central role in the narrative, but only a small part of the entire work. It is a part of a larger romance narrative in which the *Acteur's* character interacts in a complicated landscape with a number of characters such as the god of Love, Pallas, Diana, and others. This framework is used to comment on the *Roman de la Rose*, critiquing the *Amant's* love and pursuit of the *Rose* as a negative example. In the *Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé*, there is very little narrative at all and the goal is overtly didactic.

<sup>34</sup> There is one exception. The author forgets to name one of the lady's bishops and omits the devil's fourth move entirely.

of the devil or an act of resistance on the part of the lady—is derived from the specific threat of one chess piece to another.

### Devil

	h	g	f	e	d	c	b	a
1	<u>R</u> Murmure	<u>Kt</u> Discorde		<u>Ki</u> Orgueil		<u>B</u> Ypocrisie	<u>Kt</u> Mensonge	<u>R</u> Faulceté
2	<u>P</u> Blaspheme	<u>P</u> Detraction	<u>P</u> Inconstance		<u>P</u> Fiction	<u>P</u> Curiosité	<u>P</u> Parjure	<u>P</u> Trahison
3								
4				<u>P</u> Amour de soy		<u>B</u> Volupté		
5	<u>Q</u> Ambition			P Amour de Dieu				
6		P Benivolenc e						
7	P Temper- ance		P Devotion		P Contenance	P [unnamed]	P Constance	P Fidelité
8	R Patience	Kt Vray amytié	B Honnesteté	Ki Charité	Q Humilité	B Cognois- sance de soy-mesmes	Kt Verité	R Loyauté

### Lady

Fig. 5. A series of moves in *Le Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé*.

As an example, let us consider a series of three moves (see Fig. 5). When the devil moves forward the bishop called Sensual Desire (Volupté) from f1 to c4, the narrator explains that he, the devil, does so for strategic reasons, that is, reasons which pertain to the literal game. Just prior to this move, the devil moved forward his queen called Ambition (d1 to h5) in response to which the lady moved forward her pawn called Benevolence (g7 to g6). As a result of this

new move, the devil's queen no longer poses such a threat to her king, and so the devil moves forward the bishop. By doing this, he hopes to put himself in a position from which he can take the lady's pawn devotion (f7) and thus put her king in check. In the lady's next move, the lady, of course, takes the devil's queen, Ambition (h5), with the pawn, Benevolence (g6). According to the narrator, the reasons for the move are strategic. A short time later, the lady takes the bishop Sensual pleasure with her pawn, Continence.<sup>35</sup> The allegorical meanings are derived from the specific interaction between certain pairs of pieces, here, between Ambition and Benevolence and Sensual Desire and Continence. Acts of benevolence are cited as being the manner in which saints, apostles, and martyrs were able to conquer arrogant and powerful tyrants [fol. 16v]. The devil's moving of Sensual Desire, however, does not play into this allegory. It plays a role in the confrontation between Sensual Desire and Continence. This move is of obvious value from the allegorical point of view. This is very similar to the relationship between pieces in the *Echecs*, as I described it above. When the man takes her piece called *Biautés* with his piece called *Desir*, the allegorical significance is derived from the specific interaction between these two pieces.<sup>36</sup>

### The Optimism of the *Jeu*

Although the *Jeu* bears the influence of these two traditions, it is nonetheless original in its optimistic vision. In static chess moralities, the narrator presents the world as he sees it or the world as it should be, but does not insist on the dangers of the world or how to correct them. There is no real conflict presented

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<sup>35</sup> The chess play here is obviously not of a high caliber. Murray goes so far as to suggest that "it is the worst-played game that [he has] ever seen recorded" ("An Early Work," 285 [see note 2]). This is quite a claim considering the extremely high number of texts he consulted in writing his *History of Chess* (see note 3).

<sup>36</sup> There is one major difference between the structure of the allegory in the *Echecs* and the *Jeu*. In the *Echecs amoureux*, each move signifies a particular stage or event in this process of the man falling in love with the woman. There is a certain amount of continuity in the allegory since each move represents a different move in the process. This is not the case for the *Jeu des esches de la dame moralisé*. The narrative is unlike that of the *Echecs amoureux* in that this particular work does not seem to recount one specific instance of temptation; each sequential move is not a part of an overarching narrative tale. Rather, it presents a great number of sins to which the woman, like all human beings, may fall prey—for example, hypocrisy, arrogance, or ambition—and urges the woman to be vigilant in her resistance to such weakness. Thus, each of the woman's moves reflects a way in which the particular sin in question may be resisted. The beginning and end of the game can only represent the beginning and end of her life. But, of course, since the game remains hypothetical and advisory, this particular lady to whom the narrator dedicates his tale does not need to die.



and one has no idea whether Cessolis or Wales believed that their moralities would have any corrective influence. In the active chess moralities and other texts that associate loss at chess with sin, the chess match is most often used to demonstrate moral weakness on the part of a particular player. In most cases, we see a player giving into temptation and losing the chess match. In the *Echecs amoureux*, the *Acteur* rarely recognizes the danger he is in and fails to make defensive moves, playing more and more poorly until he loses the match. In the *Miracles de Nostre Dame*, in which the player surprisingly defeats the devil, it is not because of his own virtuous character as I mentioned earlier. Gautier de Coinci presents the human being as entirely powerless in his struggle with the devil and argues that it is only because of God that the human wins the match and is ultimately saved.

Yet this is not all the case in the *Jeu*. The lady is always aware of the danger at hand, this because of the ever-present narrator, and she defeats the devil because of her own virtue. At every move made by the devil, the narrator urges the young woman to avoid sin and gives her advice on how to avoid this particular sin in question. When the devil moves forward his bishop called Sensual Desire for example, the narrator's response is as follows:

Par le Chapitre precedent, vous avez veu le furieux fol de volu[p]té comme incessamment il cherche à nous matter. Et si vous n'y donnez ordre, il veult prandre le pyon de devotion devant vostre alphin pour donner eschec à vostre roy . . . Pourquoi je suis d'oppinion que devez gecter le pion de devant vostre dame qui est continence . . . pour prandre ce fol de volupté. Selon Aristote, continence n'est autre chose sinon lier ses passions et demeurer ferme en vertus et immobile. [Fol. 22r]

[In the preceding chapter, you saw how the furious bishop of sensual desire incessantly seeks to mate us. And if you do not take care of this, he will want to take the pawn of devotion in front of your bishop in order to put your king in check . . . This is why I am of the opinion that you should move that pawn which sits in front of your queen, the one called continence . . . in order to take this bishop of sensual desire. According to Aristotle, continence is nothing other than to remain in control of ones passions and to remain firm and unchangeable in virtue.]

It is by means of the specific sin called sensual desire that the devil intends to conquer the lady. The narrator's response is obvious—he wishes to encourage her to remain reasonable and virtuous in the face of such temptation. Good chess play is thereby associated with virtuous behavior. What is particularly interesting and original about the *Jeu* is that the application of this detailed chess allegory to this situation of being a good Christian is that it empowers the reader to do good and gives one specific instructions for how to avoid sin. Leaving the question of salvation by grace aside, it focuses on the more practical issue of virtuous behavior. Unlike the *Miracles de Nostre Dame* in which the narrator reminds the reader that it is only because of God's and

specifically Our Lady's intervention on our behalf in the game against the devil that we are not defeated and thereby damned, the *Jeu* gives practical advice on how the human being can resist sin on one's own. Thus it is surprisingly optimistic both from a religious standpoint and in terms of the nature of the active chess morality in which one player is defeated because of his lack of moral strength.

## Part II: Women On and Off the Chessboard



## Chapter 5

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### Medieval Chess, Perceval's Education, and a Dialectic of Misogyny

... we use chess as an educational tool to promote learning and to help young people develop skills in critical thinking and problem solving.<sup>1</sup>

And when Perceval saw the beauty of the chess pieces he came toward them and looked at the pieces a long while. And when he had looked at them for a time he took the pieces and handled them, and then he pushed one forward, and a piece moved back against him.<sup>2</sup>

Medievalists looking at the recent packaging of chess as a means for education might be tempted into a *plus ça change* reaction, and this modern use of the game as a pedagogical tool in many ways resembles earlier depictions of chess as part of young person's, or more accurately a young man's, education. Just one of many possible examples can be found in the thirteenth-century Middle Dutch poem *Roman von Walewein*, where the eponymous young hero chases a mysterious flying chess set back to its owner, King Wonder:

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<sup>1</sup> From Chess-in-the-Schools, "a nonprofit educational organization dedicated to improving academic performance and building self-esteem among inner-city public school children." (<http://www.chessintheschools.org/s/index.cfm?SSID=1>, last accessed on March 15, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> *The Romance of Perceval in Prose: A Translation of the E Manuscript of the Didot Perceval*, trans. Dell Skeels (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1961), 22.

Daer vant hi den coninc Wondre  
 Ende zinen sone Alydrisondre  
 Ende tscaecspel tusschen hem beden staen  
 Dat hem die pine al hadde ghedaen  
 Daer up so speilden si ten scape.<sup>3</sup> (vv. 811–15)

[There he found King Wonder  
 and his son Alydrisondre  
 with between them the chess-set  
 that had caused him so much suffering;  
 they were playing a game of chess.]

Here the board is associated quite literally with Wonder. Yet while the board and its pieces at Arthur's court had formerly been otherworldly, its position between the two men reminds us of its more pedestrian uses. Walewein, it seems, has stumbled upon a lesson that is being imparted from father to son, an impression reinforced by the activity of the knights around them, who practice swordplay; chess and mock warfare both simulate real battles and ostensibly teach their players to be better fighters. True, this scene might not match the mission articulated on the Chess-in-the-Schools website. Nonetheless it reflects contemporary medieval visions of the game as a means to educate.<sup>4</sup> To this account of Walewein, we can add descriptions of chess being taught to Alexander the Great in the twelfth-century *Li romans d'Alixandre*, to Charle-

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<sup>3</sup> Both the original Middle Dutch and the translation are from Penninc and Pieter Vostaert, *Roman van Walewein*, ed. and trans. David F. Johnson. Garland Library of Medieval Literature, 81, A (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), ll. 811–15. The italics represent expanded abbreviations found in the original MS.

<sup>4</sup> This movement to repackaging chess as an educational vehicle rather than an extra-curricular diversion or sport has been taking place for over a decade. A 1996 article in the *New York Times* explains how high school students in Harlem, one of the city's more economically and educationally challenged neighborhoods, benefit from learning the game. See Emily M. Bernstein, "Checkmating Adversity With the Dark Knights," *New York Times*, February 11, 1996. Many school programs were launched in the 1980s: Chess-in-the-Schools started in 1986; Chess For Education (<http://www.chessforeducation.com>, last accessed March 15, 2011) an organization that teaches chess to Texas schoolchildren, started in the 1980s; and the well-known Berkeley Chess School (<http://www.berkeleychessschool.org>, last accessed March 15, 2011) was started in 1982. In recent years even more groups like these have proliferated. Chess Wizards (<http://www.chesswizards.com>, last accessed March 15, 2011), a Chicago-based organization, was launched in 2003, and America's Foundation for Chess (<http://www.af4c.org>, last accessed March 15, 2011) was started in 2000. This recent surge in popularity of chess in schools has not gone unnoticed by the United States Chess Federation (USCF): "Scholastic chess has grown enormously in the past several years. While exact figures of how many school chess programs exist and how many students are playing, one indication might be the number of students who participate in national scholastic tournaments. Last spring, the SuperNationals . . . attracted over 5300 players from Kindergarten through the 12th grade from all over the United States. The largest scholastic tournament ever held!" (<http://main.uschess.org/content/view/7452/131>, last accessed March 15, 2011).

magne's children in Philippe Mouskes's thirteenth-century *Chronicle*, and to the young Hugh in *Parise la Duchesse*, a thirteenth-century *chanson de geste*.<sup>5</sup> Even the saintly Alexius learns "of chesse pleieyng & of tablere" when he is sent to the emperor for courtly training, although he ultimately rejects these lessons as not "worþ a flye" and decides instead to "serven god wiþ mylde mood."<sup>6</sup>

While these examples are all linked by their emphasis on chess's pedagogical associations, they also capture the persistent image of the game as one of male prerogative. In *Walewein* we soon discover that the peace and order in Wonder's kingdom stem at least in part from rigid rules of segregation that divide men and women for meals and for various other activities. In the other stories, chess is firmly part of the education of young men and not of young women. Chess-in-the-Schools does not follow a similarly unisex policy. However, it is notable that of the top players listed on the Chess-in-the-Schools site, only one or two are female.<sup>7</sup>

Before I push harder on such similarities between past and present, it is important to limn some of the differences, the most immediate of which is the ostensible goal of play. In the *Roman von Walewein* the connections between chess and physical battle are explicit; it is doubtful that the organizers of Chess-in-the-Schools would endorse the use of the game as a preparation for armed engagement or as a skill necessary for people of a certain social class. Moreover, the game's appearance in a court rather than in a school further highlights this discrepancy between chess's medieval symbolic charge, which often fore-ground the game's ties to violence, and its current cultural valences, which tend to obscure the battle elements of the game. Even more troubling than the game's violent undertones were its ties to gambling, and for this reason chess was frequently banned from medieval universities. This blacklisting of the game makes the positive representations of chess in medieval literature all the more striking.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, in the pages that follow I will argue that despite these striking differences, early thirteenth-century medieval representations of chess in many ways anticipate our current linking of the game to abstract thought and

<sup>5</sup> For the relevant passages in these works and others, see H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Chess* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1913), 432–33, 446 (see notes 1–6).

<sup>6</sup> From the Middle English Life of St. Alexius in Adam Davy's *Five Dreams About Edward II: The Life of St. Alexius, Solomon's Book of Wisdom, St. Jeremie's Fifteen Tokens Before Doomsday. The Lamentacion of the Souls*, edited from the Laud MS 622 in the Bodleian Library, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall. Early English Text Society, 69 (London: N. Trubner & Co.: 1878), ll. 989–90 and 992.

<sup>7</sup> Chess-in-the-Schools (<http://chessintheschools.org/s/index.cfm?aid=126>, last accessed March 15, 2011) gives the list of the Top 10 Junior High Players, of which none are female. The list of Top 10 Elementary School Players also has no female names. The Top 10 CIS College Bound Players list has two girls on it.

<sup>8</sup> On bans against the game, see Murray, *A History of Chess*, 441 (see his note 66).

intellectual development. I will further contend that these changes in the game's symbolic valences began to change at the same time that education itself was, in the early thirteenth century, undergoing a shift away from an emphasis on external authority and toward a promotion of self-developed reason as a both an educational goal and as a launching point for further pedagogical development. Chess, a game of abstraction, became an apt vehicle to represent this new style of thinking. Finally, I will suggest that this connection of chess to abstract thought and reason is embedded in a discourse of misogyny, one that still lingers in the modern chess world. This is not to say that chess was never again linked to physical prowess or moral worth, or completely detached from the sordid pastime of gambling. Yet it is to argue that the use of the game to represent reason, self-governance, and intellectual development, features later coded as masculine traits, finds its roots in medieval narrative.<sup>9</sup>

Elsewhere, I have looked at late thirteenth-century didactic works in order to consider some of the political implications of the game's rehabilitation.<sup>10</sup> Here I will pursue a different approach, focusing instead on one popular legend, that of Perceval, which I will take as my test case. A young knight whose story is taken up repeatedly by medieval authors, Perceval functions as a register for the changes I have described not only because his was a popular story but because education forms *the* core theme of his legend. Although writers approached the story in different ways, every version of the narrative maps the transformation of Perceval from a bumbling, uneducated boy to a mature member of Arthur's court. Along the way he meets different advisors and challenges, and in some versions a chessboard. In Chrétien de Troyes's early version of the legend, the game denotes the moral failings of Perceval's friend and fellow knight Gawain; in a later continuation of Chrétien's unfinished poem, the game is moved to a central location in the story and symbolizes Perceval's own mastery of his desires and his capacity for intellectual growth. That chess continues to appear in the legend, that it moves from the periphery

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<sup>9</sup> Lorraine Code has referred to this as the Reason/Masculinity construct in *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991). See in particular her chapter titled "The Autonomy of Reason" (110–72). Other feminist scholars—Alessandra Tanesini, *An Introduction of Feminist Epistemologies*. *Thinking Gender* (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), Victor Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity: Reason, Language, and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), and eadem, *Unreasonable Men: Masculinity and Social Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), Nancy Jay, "Gender and Dichotomy," *Feminist Studies* 7 (1981): 37–56, and Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1993)—have demonstrated the masculinization of reason, their work growing out of a much older critique of Cartesian mind/body dualism.

<sup>10</sup> See my *Power Play: The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).



to the center, and that it becomes a game of abstraction rather than a physical tool, all provide telling markers of the its changed status.

### *Le Conte du Graal* and the Education of Appearances

Sometime around 1180 Chrétien de Troyes composed *Le Conte du Graal*, a poem that would become one of the most well circulated versions of the Perceval legend. In Chrétien's poem Perceval begins the story as a rustic so ignorant that he mistakes a band of knights he meets in the forest for angels. After this meeting, he decides to go to Arthur's court, and before he departs, his mother gives him a short lesson in courtly behavior. Later in the story he receives another set of rules about courtliness from his mentor, Gornemant de Gohort, and finally, after meeting his hermit uncle, he learns how to pray. As Madelaine Cosman has aptly observed, Chrétien's Perceval is clearly "portrayed as passing through periods of deliberate instruction," and his successes at his various adventures "depend on this youthful education."<sup>11</sup> By the end of the story Perceval seems to have learned about the world of courtliness only to reject it and commit himself to his faith. His adventures do not end at the Fisher King's castle, the climax of many versions of the story, but at the house of his hermit uncle, where he attends mass daily.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Madeleine Pelter Cosman, *The Education of the Hero in Arthurian Romance* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 50. It should be noted that in Chrétien's story Perceval does not succeed in his quest for the grail. As Cosman has shown, this educational process is linear, and it proceeds in a step-by-step fashion with each educational encounter following the other and expanding on material not covered in the previous lesson. Cosman charts Chrétien's "structural use of all three educational periods" the hero's progression through each. See Cosman, *The Education of the Hero*, 72. To these three I have added another, namely Perceval's experience with the knights at the story's beginning. It is here that he asks some crucial questions about armor and weapons.

<sup>12</sup> There is of course no way to know if this is the ending Chrétien envisioned. Most scholars assume that *Le Conte du Graal*, which breaks off at the end of line 9234—this is in the middle of Gawain's adventures—is incomplete. Perceval's own story, however, seems decisively ended at the house of the hermit uncle. As Chrétien notes of his own source for the tale:

De Percheval plus longuement  
Ne parole li contes chi,  
Ainz avrez molt ançois oï  
De monseignor Gavain parler  
Que rien m'oiez de lui conter (vv. 6513—17)

[At this time, the book relates no more of Perceval, but I've heard more material about the lord Gawain, much more than you have heard me tell before]

The French text comes from *Le Roman de Perceval; ou, Le Conte du graal*, ed. William Roach. Textes littéraires français. (Paris: Librairie Minard; Geneva: Droz, 1959). The English translation comes from *Perceval; or The Story of the Grail*, trans. Ruth Harwood Cline (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 176.

Notably, Perceval never encounters a chessboard during his travels, and the game is unattached to his educational development. Chess *does* show up in the story, though, when Gawain, whose adventure eventually becomes Chrétien's focus, is caught wooing a young woman. When the two are interrupted, Gawain grabs a nearby chessboard and its pieces as weapons to fend off his attackers. Here, Chrétien reminds us of the game's implicit violence, and chess becomes, quite literally, a game of war. Moreover, by placing the board near a flirting couple Chrétien also plays on the game's frequent association with sexual dalliance. In the end, then, chess ends up serving as a marker of Gawain's ability for battle and his talent for suspect relationships with women; it does not register his ability for intellectual thought.<sup>13</sup>

It could be argued that Gawain has mastered some of the training that Perceval lacks. Yet in his excessive concern with appearances and his inability to see the board's symbolic value, Gawain makes mistakes that resemble those of his more rustic companion. For both knights, the problem is one of spiritual lack. Thus just at the first part of the story concerns Perceval's ignorance of God and the different educational models that do and do not work in the face of his lack of knowledge, so too does the second part start off with a diagnosis of Gawain's own spiritual vacuity, which in his case is caused by too great of an investment in appearances rather than an ignorance of them.

The game's distance from Perceval and its attachment to the spiritually bankrupt Gawain are telling and suggests that Chrétien saw this pastime as one of indolent recreation and moral laxity. Perhaps even more telling in this regard is the type of education that Perceval *does* receive, which mirrors the type of pedagogy found in early twelfth-century cathedral schools and teachers such as Bernard de Clairvaux, who placed a premium on external instruction as a precursor to knowledge. It is worthwhile to trace the contours of Perceval's education in order to see the lessons in morality Chrétien views as important for a young man's training, how those lessons are imparted, and the role chess has in (at its best) marking educational failure or (at its worst) distracting players from moral life.

As noted above, Perceval's lessons are aimed at fostering his sense of morality, and these lessons are imparted almost entirely by the teaching figures he encounters. Transplanted nearly wholesale from cathedral schools to court and often filtered through the rubric of courtly love, this type of moral instruction

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<sup>13</sup> The most notable example of this use of the game is in the anonymously authored fourteenth-century *Les Echecs amoureux*, in which the male narrator plays with a beautiful woman while the God of Love watches their match.

emphasized several basic qualities.<sup>14</sup> As C. Stephen Jaeger has observed, among them were *humanitas*, a “strong authority reigned in and restrained by gen-tleness” that came to be associated “with human kindness, mercy, compassion that was Christian and monastic”; elegance and manners that often sprang from an internal noblesse; and *amicitia*, which knit together students and teachers.<sup>15</sup> This last quality was perhaps the most important as imitation of the teacher was essential to learning, and “teaching by example became the dominant pastoral duty.”<sup>16</sup>

In the *Perceval* the importance of teaching figures is apparent from the opening lines. When Perceval encounters a band of five knights in the forest, he meets his first teachers and gets an introduction to courtly culture. The knights, who are seeking a maiden and the five men who have captured her, press him impatiently, asking if he has seen any signs of riders. But he refuses to answer them, and his conversation with them takes the form of a series of questions as he asks the knights to identify their javelins, shields, and helmets—equipment he has never seen before. Although Perceval's queries provide an occasion for humor, his questions also expose the hero's lack of training and need for instruction; he seeks basic and factual information about the mechanics of knighthood. Soon, Perceval asks so many questions—“Qui estes dont?” (“Who are you?”) and “Ce que est et de coi vos sert?” (“What do you use this for?”)—that the knights grow angry.<sup>17</sup> One of the knights, calling attention to his own role as teacher, berates Perceval:

Je quidoie, se Diex m'avant,  
Que tu noveles me deïsses  
Ainz que de moi les apreïsses,  
Et tu vels que je tes apraigne (vv. 217–20)

[So help me God, I truly thought  
you would instruct me as I sought  
about the knights whom I pursue  
and you have me here instructing you].

<sup>14</sup> Jaeger has carefully charted this shift in *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994). This section of my argument is largely indebted to his work. See in particular his chapter “Cultus Virtutum,” 76–117.

<sup>15</sup> Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 98, 94, and 103 respectively (see note 14).

<sup>16</sup> Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 79 (see note 14). Addressing the relationship between instructor and student, Jaeger notes that “an atmosphere of loving friendship was praised and cultivated, at both schools and court from the early Middle Ages on” (104).

<sup>17</sup> The French is from Roach, *Le Roman de Perceval*, ll. 175 and 214 (see note 12). The English is from Cline, *Perceval, or The Story of the Grail*, ll. 176 and 214 (also note 12). Subsequent references to these texts will be made parenthetically by the line numbers in Roach's edition. It should be noted that Cline's line numbers are sometimes one digit off from those of Roach.

Another knight advises the group to give up their questioning, since:

... sachiez tot entresait  
 Que Galois sont tot par nature  
 Plus fol que bestes en pasture (vv. 242–44)

[... you must have learned  
 that all Welshmen are inherently  
 more dumb than grazing beasts could be]

He adds, “Cist est ausi come une beste” (245; “This one is also as simple as a beast;” translation my own). The leader, however, does not give up on his student and vows to answer all the boy’s questions before they leave. His decision is rewarded when, at long last, Perceval tells him that the men with the maiden have indeed passed through the forest.

Perceval’s next steps in the educational process further confirm his dependence on external authority. When he returns home to ask his mother about the men he has met in the forest, she explains that the men are knights, reveals that his father was also a knight, and gives him a firm set of instructions that she believes accords with knightly behavior. Her advice takes the form of several main dicta: help women in trouble; only take a kiss, or under certain circumstances a ring, from a lady; ask the names of the men whose company you keep; be sure to converse with gentlemen; and go to church.<sup>18</sup> Later in the story the avuncular knight Gornemant will offer a slightly different, although not entirely unrelated, list of prohibitions and recommendations. After teaching Perceval how to hold a shield, clasp a lance, check a steed, and joust, the older lord gives him the following advice: have mercy on men who ask for it in battle; avoid excessive speech; always help men or women in distress; and go to church. Although Cosman sees these two sets of instructions as generically divided into religious training (on the part of the hero’s mother) and chivalric instruction (on the part of Gornemant), this distinction seems artificial given the overlap between them.<sup>19</sup> Like the knights, Perceval’s mother and Gornemant act as authorities and train the hero in the skills necessary for his advancement.<sup>20</sup>

Nor do Perceval’s teachers confine themselves to offering advice; the Bernardian insistence on obeying one’s master and teaching by example also predominates. This is especially true in the case of the story’s male teachers. Gornemant mounts his horse three separate times to show Perceval how to handle a charger then demonstrates the proper way to hold a lance, fence with

<sup>18</sup> For a description of this scene in other versions of the story, excluding the *Didot* text, see Cosman, *The Education of the Hero*, 54–55 (see note 11).

<sup>19</sup> Cosman, *The Education of the Hero*, 52 (see note 11).

<sup>20</sup> Perceval’s mishaps early in the story are not due to faulty education but to the hero’s tendency to take words too literally. His mother’s good advice is later backed up by Gornemant.

a sword, and protect oneself with a shield. This modeling takes a less physical form in the case of the hermit uncle. When, at the story's end, Perceval devotes himself to God, the uncle teaches his nephew a prayer by whispering it in his ear and requests that Perceval stay to learn from him.<sup>21</sup> The two men eat the same meal, and the story leaves the hero in the process of adapting to his uncle's monastic lifestyle.

More strikingly, such injunctions, including mandates to help those in trouble and to pray, reflect the story's emphasis on ethical responsibility, one of the main lessons of early twelfth-century pedagogy, which aimed "to a higher goal . . . of virtue and 'composed manners,'" (i.e., the *humanitas* and *amicitia* described above).<sup>22</sup> One major proponent of this type of teaching was Bernard de Clairvaux, who in his writings emphasized manners and, above all, faith.<sup>23</sup> In her monograph on Bernard, Gillian R. Evans notes that the monk emphasized affective spirituality buttressed by natural intellect and promoted three "modes of attaining knowledge."<sup>24</sup> These included the evidence of the senses "in the endeavour to behave well in the sight of God," the knowledge to find God, and the "intellectual apperception of the truth."<sup>25</sup>

Even if Chrétien did not consciously fashion his story to reflect Bernardian teaching, his *Perceval*, like Bernard's writings, highlights the balance between a natural capacity for knowledge and the process of learned faith. Perceval begins the story so ignorant of Christianity that he must ask his mother to explain the words "church" and "chapel." His mother uses this occasion to lecture him on the basics tenets of Christian thought, a lesson expanded on by Gornemant, who later counsels him on the value of prayer and the importance of helping people in trouble. Nor do these lessons remain in the realm of abstraction. Gornemant's injunction that Perceval show mercy in battle is a lesson in applied *humanitas*, while the mother's directive to treat wise

<sup>21</sup> The lines in question are 6482 and 6476–79.

<sup>22</sup> Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 118 (see note 16).

<sup>23</sup> Bernard's apparent influence on Chrétien may have stemmed from physical proximity: Chrétien's hometown of Troyes was also the location of Bernard's monastery, the Abbey of Clairvaux, which he founded on the bank of the Aube in 1115. It should also be noted that Chrétien, who was most likely educated as a cleric, had probably started his career as a writer by 1160, only seven years after Bernard's death. Dates for the composition of his poems range from shortly after 1158 to 1190; *Le Conte du Graal*, the last romance, was most likely composed between 1180 and 1190. For information on Chrétien's education as a cleric, see Karl D. Uitti and Michelle A. Freeman, *Chrétien de Troyes Revisited*. Twayne's World Authors Series, 855 (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 6–7.

<sup>24</sup> Gillian R. Evans, *Bernard de Clairvaux*. Great Medieval Thinkers (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 54. See in particular Evans's third chapter "Academic Theology: Bernard and a Different Sort of Learning," 42–56. Another excellent overview, this time in German, comes in Peter Dinzelsbacher, *Bernhard von Clairvaux: Leben und Werk des berühmten Zisterziensers* (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998).

<sup>25</sup> Evans, *Bernard de Clairvaux*, 54 (see note 24).

gentlemen with respect falls squarely in the realm of *amicitia*. Later in the story Perceval's hermit uncle repeats a set of lessons similar to those of Gornemant. Although the uncle focuses on spirituality rather than on knightly prowess, his advice—repent for one's sins, love God, respect good men and women, and help any women in danger—touches more generally on virtuous action. Yet despite their advice about *humanitas* and *amicitia*, all three characters—the mother, Gornemant, and the uncle—emphasize the centrality of faith and the importance of prayer, a cornerstone of Bernardian thought.

If Chrétien, with his depiction of authority figures who encourage their student's innate capacity for *humanitas* and *amicitia*, draws on the "how" and "what" of Bernardian education, he also shares Bernard's faith in visible markers of virtue. How do we know that Perceval has mastered his lessons? Very simply—he changes his clothes. Perceval puts on at least three different outfits as the tale progresses, beginning with his thick Welsh shirt, to which he later adds the armor he removes from the knight in red, an addition that indicates his newfound knowledge of battle. His next costume change takes place when Gornemant orders his pupil to replace his poor garments with red hose and breeches, which are more becoming to his social station. "Amis," says Gornemant, "ces dras que chi veez / Vestirez, se vos m'en creez" (1607–08; "Friend, if you've confidence in me / put on this clothing that you see"). Finally, when Perceval at last reaches the house of his hermit uncle, he meets a group of ten penitents, whose woolen gowns testify to their faith. Although we are not told that Perceval changes his clothes, he does lay aside his armor, and his hermit uncle's advice to attend church as a penitent suggest that he, too, will soon be wearing vestments. While this emphasis on dress may seem to contradict spiritual teachings, Perceval's change of garments is in accordance with Bernard's conception of beauty as a virtuous trait.<sup>26</sup> When Perceval finally has his own armor, it is Gornemant who fixes the spur to his foot, attaches the sword, and insists on the boy's change of clothing, a (re)dressing that comes immediately before his long lecture on virtue. This juxtaposition, the acquisition of proper clothes followed by a lesson on proper behavior, highlights the close ties between the external and internal, bringing the entire encounter into

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<sup>26</sup> In his discussion of Psalm 92, Bernard writes: "The beauty of actions is visible testimony to the state of the conscience . . . But when the luminosity of this beauty fills the inner depths of the heart, it overflows and surges outward. Then the body, the very image of the mind, catches up this light glowing and bursting forth like rays of the sun. All its senses and all its members are suffused with it, until its glow is seen in every act, in speech, in *appearance*, in the way of walking and laughing." This is cited in Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 111 (see note 16), emphasis added. Jaeger is in turn citing *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, ed. Jean LeClercq, Charles H. Talbot, and Henri Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957–77) 2: 314. Here Bernard argues that inner grace manifests itself in three ways: through appearance (i.e., physical looks), speech, and by physical actions, exemplified in this passage by walking and laughing. Gornemant mentors Perceval in all of these categories.

accordance with Bernard's pedagogical ideals. Not only does the concern with appearance surface in Perceval's conversation with Gornemant, it allows us to read the young hero's initial questioning of the strange knights as an act of educational inquiry rather than one of mere nosiness. That he mistakes them for angels, fearing that he has "molt pechié" (139), or committed a dreadful sin, points to the connection between virtue and apparel—the knights both look and are good.<sup>27</sup>

Later copies of Chrétien's text place an even stronger emphasis on Perceval's mastery of both visible and invisible signs of virtue, and make clear that the ultimate goal of his education is spiritual growth. Looking at the miniatures in a late thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Perceval* copied after Chrétien had composed the story, Sandra Hindman finds that the illustrations themselves narrate the hero's move from secular to clerical life.<sup>28</sup> Over a series of three pictures, Perceval prays in front of the knights, changes his clothes, and ends the story praying at the house of his hermit uncle. In these images Perceval's altered character, reflected in his change of dress, betokens a shift from a devotion to secular power to a devotion to God. In one of the several continuations of the story bound into this particular manuscript, the progress from secular to spiritual is further emphasized by a matching frontispiece and concluding miniature, the former showing Perceval kneeling in front of the knights and the last showing the hero in clerical robes kneeling "before a woman symbolizing the church."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Chrétien was not the only author who, when structuring Perceval's educational journey, felt Bernard's influence. John Cleland has demonstrated that Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, written around 1200, provides a textbook model of "bernardian [sic] psychology" at work. Patterned very closely on *Le Conte du Graal*, this story features a hero who acquires knowledge "through the senses and not through mystical neo-platonic insights" and learns from "character-forming teachers encountered over long periods." Throughout the narrative Parzival struggles for a wisdom that transcends earthly knowledge, and although the hero ends up triumphant in the secular world—he becomes a king, marries, and produces heirs to his throne—the educational thrust is toward his spiritual development. Parzival, like Bernard, experiences his own spiritual crisis, an incident that does not appear in Chrétien's version. Also like Bernard, Parzival goes through a profound period of doubt and a misconception of God as a remote and merciless ruler. And finally, like Bernard, Parzival ultimately finds salvation through repentance. See John Cleland, "Bernardian Ideas in Wolfram's *Parzival* About Christian War and Human Development," *The Chimaera of His Age: Studies on Bernard of Clairvaux*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder and John R. Sommerfeldt. *Studies in Medieval Cistercian History*, 5 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 39–63; here 42.

<sup>28</sup> Sandra Hindman, *Sealed in Parchment: Rereadings of Knighthood in the Illuminated Manuscripts of Chrétien de Troyes* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 13. Hindman is referring to Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 12576.

<sup>29</sup> Hindman, *Sealed in Parchment*, 37 (see note 28). In medieval plays a character's redemption or penance is often signaled by a change in clothing. For example, after Everyman offers up his confession and accepts his penance, his Knowledge tells him to put on a new garment "which is wette with [his] teres" (l. 639). Similarly, when Mankind turns his thoughts from God, New

Notably, Perceval learns the importance of the spiritual life without ever touching a chessboard. Yet chess does appear in the story, and its prophylactic distance from Perceval illustrates clearly the division that Chrétien saw between this particular pastime and the weightier subject of education, particularly an education in spirituality. Indeed, this association of chess with moral lack is also keeping with Bernard, who in his early twelfth-century *Exhortatio ad Milites Templi* [*Exhortation to the Templar Knights*] prohibits them from playing “scacos et aleas” [chess and dice].<sup>30</sup>

The game shows up as Chrétien stops narrating Perceval’s adventures and turns to those of Gawain, the main character for in the final part of *Le Conte du Graal*. A knight known for his chivalry, Gawain does not appear to need an education in courtly behavior, nor does the narrative show him mastering any knowledge. Yet it is Gawain’s very penchant for courtly love, an inferior surrogate for spiritual *caritas*, that gets him into trouble in this section of the poem, and his encounter with chess suggests that he, like Perceval, suffers from deficient moral development. The chessboard makes its first appearance not as a game but as a weapon that Gawain uses after he is discovered kissing the daughter of the man he has earlier killed. This placement provides the first indication of the board’s associations with violence and passion rather than with logical thought. (Gawain has been accused of killing the man without issuing a formal challenge.) To the couple’s credit, neither knows that Gawain has murdered her father. Gawain has in fact been trying to find the slain man’s home in order to clear his name and make reparations, and he has stopped in this particular town purely by chance. On the woman’s part, she has been instructed by her brother, who is also ignorant of Gawain’s identity, to entertain the visiting knight. Nevertheless, Chrétien does not exculpate them entirely, and all calm is soon destroyed when a vavasor in the court recognizes Gawain as his lord’s murderer and musters the townsfolk. The daughter and Gawain, fearing for their lives, try their best to defend themselves with the only objects at hand:

Maintenant cort les armes prendre  
 Cele qui n’estoit pas seüre.  
 Quant ele l’ot de l’armeüre  
 Bien armé, si douterent mains  
 Et ele et mesure Gavains;  
 Mais que tant de meschief i ot

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Wyse offers him “a fresch jakett after the new wyse” (l. 677). See *Everyman and Mankind, Medieval Drama: An Anthology*, ed. Greg Walker. Blackwell Anthologies (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 411 (see note 5).



Que d'escu point avoir ne pot,  
 Si fist escu d'un eschequier,  
 Et dist: "Amie, je ne quier  
 Que vos m'ailliez autre escu querre." (vv. 5886–95)

[Though far from calm at such an hour  
 the maiden fetched the arms in haste.  
 When all the armor had been placed  
 on Sir Gawain, they felt secure,  
 but to his great discomfiture,  
 he could not find a shield: instead  
 he picked a chessboard up and said,  
 "Dear, this is all I want to wield,  
 don't search for any other shield."]

The violence represented by the chess game here becomes literalized, the board itself covering Gawain so effectively that no further protection is needed. As the fight begins, this image of violence moving off the board and into real life is further enhanced by the sudden utility of the pieces themselves—the couple hurl from the tower where they have taken refuge on to their assailants below. They defend themselves "mix et mix . . . / De gros eschés que il lor rüent" (6010–11; "with more and more success / with huge men from the set of chess"), and the men soon retreat. Yet eventually, Gawain and the woman realize that they are trapped, and they are only freed when the woman's brother returns and offers amnesty to the hapless couple.

In this instance the physicalization of chess moves it away from the moral and spiritual lessons imparted to Perceval, and thus away from the *humanitas* and *amicitia* found in a Bernardian model of education. Gawain does not play the game, nor does he learn from it. Instead, the set functions as a weapon, a use that literalizes the game's symbolic violence. While it is a courtly game and also a game of sexual desire—why else would it be at hand in the same spot where Gawain woos his lover?—it is not a game that improves a young man's intellectual capacity or moral action. Instead, its presence at the scene of Gawain's humiliation underscores the knight's laxity and need for further instruction. Indeed, this image of Gawain as unable to use the chess set correctly mirrors that of his Dutch counterpart Walewein, who can only stare mutely at the board between King Wonder and Alydrisondre.

### The *Didot Perceval's* Dialectics

If *Le Conte du Graal* highlights strong teaching figures and a linear progress that results in Perceval's spiritual development, the thirteenth-century *Didot*

*Perceval* is notable for its absence of mentors and its circularity of plot. A version of the Perceval story that was adapted from one of the many continuations of Chrétien's work, the anonymously authored poem eliminates almost all hints of Bernardian model.<sup>31</sup> Perceval's advancement comes through a pattern of repetition that lands the hero in the throne of the Fisher King, and while some teachers help the hero along the way, their roles are radically reduced. Ultimately, the hero's education results from his own inquiry and experience, and from a game of chess.<sup>32</sup> Hand-in-hand with these changes in the nature of learning is a rejection of feminine influence. Not only are women unable to teach Perceval, he must also learn to avoid them altogether.

These alterations in the structure of the educational process reflect the *Didot* author's investment in emerging ideals of pedagogy, ideals stemming from what we today describe as scholasticism. As Richard W. Southern has defined it, scholastic humanism, or as he calls it "scientific humanism," represented a systemization of knowledge that served as the ancestor of the modern, secular scientific method.<sup>33</sup> Gone was a Bernardian emphasis on teaching as a unidirectional activity, with students merely repeating the lessons of their masters. Taking its place was a dialectical process by which one could arrive at a single body of wisdom. The ultimate goal of the scholastic curriculum, "was based on a uniform routine of asking questions about the meaning of statements

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<sup>31</sup> The *Didot Perceval* dates from the first half of the thirteenth century and appears in two bound, late thirteenth-century manuscripts, both of which include the prose *Joseph*, the prose *Merlin*, and the *Mort Artu*. The episodes within *Perceval* derive from a variety of pre-existing grail stories, the one exception to this being the hero's adventure at the chessboard castle. This section of the romance has been traced directly to Wachier's *Continuation*. William Roach, the poem's editor, has noted that the poet's narrative tightening yokes the story's episodes more closely together and thus places more emphasis on the action that passes at the chessboard castle. The *Didot* edition also removes all indication (found in other versions of the story) that the lady of the castle is a fairy, although the narrator identifies her as the sister of the fairy mistress of the knight of the tomb. This change, too, is important as it links her to the other female characters Perceval meets throughout his quest. See Roach's introduction to *The Didot "Perceval" According to the Manuscripts of Modena and Paris* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1941), 54–58.

<sup>32</sup> It should be added that while the structure of the plot differs in the Chrétien and *Didot* versions, the opening narrative events are similar. In both stories Perceval begins as an un-educated boy, goes to Arthur's court, and eventually ends up at the Fisher King's castle, encountering several adventures along the way. Nor do the stories differ entirely in the educational goals they set for the hero, and the development of Perceval's faith remains key to both stories just as it remained a central part of education throughout the Middle Ages. Just as faith underscored all of Bernard's teaching, so too was Christian doctrine central to Abelard's intellectual inquiry. For all four writers—Chrétien, Bernard, Abelard, and the anonymous *Didot* author—man's relationship to God, whether represented by a hero's quest for a holy object or posed as a philosophical question, was of central concern.

<sup>33</sup> Richard W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe, Volume 1 (Foundations)* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). Southern uses this phrase throughout his text.

in authoritative texts."<sup>34</sup> The rise of systematic inquiry eventually led to the migration of schools from more rural monastic settings to urban universities. Consequently, monasteries such as Bernard's began "to withdraw from and even turn against . . . former educational tasks."<sup>35</sup>

Dominant in European universities by the early thirteenth century, scholasticism represented the triumph of a twelfth-century call for skepticism. Central to the scholastic curriculum was dialectic, a field that could be loosely defined as logic but one that emphasized argumentation and critical debate. Peter Abelard's famous *Sic et non*, a treatise that laid out biblical arguments for (*sic*) and against (*non*) theological questions, was proleptic of this paradigm shift. Whereas for Bernard it was "not the spiritual that comes first but the physical," for a castrated Abelard the material world lacked such certainty.<sup>36</sup> Truth lay behind appearances not in them; only repeated examination of the same ideas would allow one to access it, and a lesson on faith could only be valid if supported by rigorous argument.

In the *Didot* version of the Perceval narrative, this new pedagogical model is embedded in the plot itself. Rather than receiving guidance from learned authorities in a linear fashion, Perceval's educational progress comes primarily through repeated challenges, and the plot moves in a circular fashion.<sup>37</sup> The story's action revolves around three main courts: Arthur's castle in Longres, a predominantly male space and seat of patriarchal power; the chessboard castle, where Perceval devotes himself to a woman; and the Fisher King's castle, another all-male space dominated by the Fisher King, who suffers from a tellingly sexual thigh wound.<sup>38</sup> Perceval visits each of these places twice, and in each instance makes a mistake that he must then correct on the second visit.

<sup>34</sup> Southern, *Scholastic Humanism*, 9 (see note 33)

<sup>35</sup> John W. Baldwin, *The Scholastic Culture of the Middle Ages, 1000–1300*. Civilization and Society. Topic Series (Lexington: D. C. Heath and Company, 1971), 37. Baldwin also adds here: "the abbey of Cluny, the foremost house of its day, abandoned its external schools in the twelfth century."

<sup>36</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, "Apologia for Abbot William," *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century*, trans. Pauline Matarasso. Penguin Classics (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 42–58; here 47.

<sup>37</sup> This structure of repetition leads to a plot with "over-organization to the point of predictability." See Norris J. Lacy, "The Design of the *Didot-Perceval*," *Continuations: Essays on Medieval French Literature and Language in Honor John L. Grisby*, ed. Norris J. Lacy and Gloria Torrini-Roblin (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, Inc., 1989), 95–106; here 103. Following Erwin Panofsky's model, one might read this crafted style as part of a high Gothic interest in symmetry and ornateness. Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*. Meridian, M44 (New York: Meridian Books, 1957).

<sup>38</sup> In medieval narratives thigh wounds commonly function as markers of sexual dysfunction. For example, in Marie de France's *Guigemar*, the eponymous hero suffers from an inability to love and is consequently wounded in his thigh. He will never be healed until he finds a woman who will suffer out of love for him and for whom he suffers pangs of love.

As Norris Lacy has observed the point of Perceval's correction occurs when the knight releases himself from his bond to the woman at the chessboard castle, who has used the game as a tool to bind him into her service, and his abandonment of her is immediately followed by the Fisher King's recovery.

This intricate structure of repetition, which keeps returning the hero to the same set of circumstances, is analogous to a dialectical model; what has seemed appropriate on one occasion is shown to be totally inappropriate during the next encounter, and the interconnectedness of the three courts complicates any type of easy or direct lesson. While the *Didot Perceval* is no *Sic et non*, the story's use of repetition as the *primary* vehicle for Perceval's growth reveals its author's commitment to a new mode of learning.

The *Didot* author's investment in learning through experience rather than tutelage points toward this new model of scholastic training, and the ways that the narrative's chess matches model pedagogical process suggests that the game, too, had undergone a shift of its own. In its nearly complete elision of Perceval's teachers, the *Didot* text heeds Abelard's aphoristic advice not to "put your faith in the words of a master out of love for him."<sup>39</sup> No knights instruct the hero at the story's beginning; Perceval's mother does not tutor her son before he leaves (in fact, it is his father, Alan li Gros, who sends him off to Arthur's court); and the character of Gornemant disappears entirely. Instead of re-counting the stages of the hero's growth as a knight, the story condenses Perceval's training in arms into a few lines. After he rides to Arthur's court, "li rois le retint et le fist cevalier; et illuec aprist molt de sens et de cortesie, car saciés que quant il issi de ciés sa mere que il ne savoit riens" ("the king kept him there and made him a knight and there he learned much of wisdom and of courtesy, for, in truth, when he left the home of his mother he knew nothing").<sup>40</sup> This is not to say that teachers have vanished altogether. A damsel informs Perceval of his blunder at the Fisher King's castle, and the hermit uncle instructs him in the history of the grail. Yet even as the *Didot* text positions the uncle as a teacher, it downplays such moments of advice. In this latter instance Perceval does not stay to share a meal with his hermit uncle but merely listens to facts about the grail, which are sprinkled with very few pieces of advice, follows his uncle's suggestion to repent, and leaves the next morning shortly after Mass.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 230 (see note 16).

<sup>40</sup> The French text comes from *The Didot Perceval*, ed. William Roach, 140 (see note 12), which relies on ms. E, the Modena manuscript. The English translation comes from *Didot Perceval, or, The Romance of Perceval in Prose*, ed. and trans. Dell Skeels (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), 8. Subsequent references to these editions will be made parenthetically by author and page number.

<sup>41</sup> In showing how the story's discourse of misogyny is covered up by and filtered through a discourse of education, I am following, albeit loosely, in the footsteps of R. Howard Bloch,

Rather than learn through teachers, the hero learns through his adventures, and one of the most important of these occurs over a chessboard. Perceval's experience at the chessboard castle thus merits deeper consideration, as it both mirrors his earlier experience at Arthur's court and proves to be the fulcrum for the knight's ascension to the throne at the end of the story. In this adventure Perceval enters a strange castle with a vacant great hall and spies a chess set. He goes over to touch its beautiful ivory pieces and ends up playing three games against an invisible opponent, who mates him three times. Angered by his loss, he rises to throw the pieces out of the window. But as he starts to drop the first one, a lady leans out of another window and orders him to replace the pieces on the board. He retorts, "Vous ne volés faire rien por moi, et vous volés que je face por vous? Mais par Saint Nicholai, se vous ne venés ça jus, je les i geterai" (Roach 168) ("You do not wish to do anything for me and you wish that I should do something for you? But, by St. Nicholas, if you do not come down here I will throw them there"; Skeels 23). Notably, this remark resembles Perceval's earlier refusal to follow the King Arthur's commands, a refusal that has caused the initial fragmentation of Arthur's court: "Sire rois, si m'aït Dex, se vous ne m'en donés le congié, je vos di bien que je ne serai plus de le vostre maisnie" (Roach 149) ("Sir King, so God aid me, if you do not give me per-mission, I tell you certainly I will no longer be of your household"; Skeels 13), Perceval insists before sitting in the forbidden seat and cracking the Round Table. In both instances—the confrontation with the lady of the chessboard castle and the confrontation with Arthur—Perceval makes a mistake at a table after having just arrived as a castle.<sup>42</sup> As with his departure from Arthur's

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who traces the impact of women's increased social power on literary production in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. As he argues, women at this time enjoyed an access to wealth and social clout unknown to women in the early medieval world, and courtly love functioned as a tool that male writers used to reassert patriarchal control. Or in Bloch's words: "The invention of Western romantic love represented, above all, a usurping reappropriation of woman at the moment she became capable of appropriating what had traditionally constituted masculine modes of wealth." R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 196. Although *Le Conte du Graal*, itself a courtly love romance, might function in part as Bloch describes, it does not share the deep misogyny of other contemporaneous romances or of the *Didot* text. Even Bloch does not have much to say about a poem that situates women, if not as equal to men, as necessary to the hero's spiritual development. In Chrétien's story Perceval's mother is central to his progress and gives her son some of his earliest lessons in knightly behavior. She is in fact so important that Perceval must do penance after he abandons her. The fact that the lesson fails is not, I would suggest, a reflection of a poor teacher or poor pedagogy. Rather, it highlights the difficulties of applying abstract lessons to real-life situations.

<sup>42</sup> It is also notable that a king is challenged in each case. Although Arthur is not dead, the cracked table symbolizes that his realm is in danger, a danger that it made even more graphic by the chess game, which only ends when the chess king is rendered powerless. The term "checkmate,"

realm, Perceval must leave the chessboard castle on a mission: he must recover a white stag and a hound. His willingness to abandon his original mission, namely to make amends for his destruction of Arthur's table, suggests that Perceval has switched his loyalties. No longer does he serve Arthur; he now serves the lady and thus seems in danger of losing his masculine independence.

This new adventure replaces his original mission and stands in opposition to it. Whereas Perceval's trip to the grail castle and the healing of the Fisher King would restore Arthur's fractured realm, the delivery of the white stag's head to the chessboard castle will only confirm his attachment to the woman who controls the chessboard castle. Moreover, Perceval's three losses at the chess game and his subsequent punishment point toward the shape this relationship will take. Reading the chess game as a manifestation of masculinized power, the lady's victory highlights the extent to which Perceval has compromised himself.<sup>43</sup> His eagerness to serve the lady—"Demisele, il n'est riens el mont, se vous le me requerés que je me face" (Roach 169) ("Damsel, there is nothing in this world which if you request it of me I would not do"; Skeels 24)—testifies to his subservience.

Perceval's inability to play a game, one that he thought he knew well, is suddenly exposed to the outside world, and the woman's unexplained appearance disrupts the comfortable feeling of solitude, suggesting that the castle may have never really been empty at all. Perceval, though, is baffled by his failure. He manifests his surprise at his repeated losses, exclaiming, "Par la foi que je doi a nostre Segnor, grant merveille voi, que je cuidoie tant de cest giu savoir, et il m'a maté par trois fois" (Roach 167) ("By the faith that I owe to our Lord, I see a marvelous thing, for I thought I knew so much of this game and it has mated me three times"; Skeels 22).<sup>44</sup> Although he does not grasp the

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a version of the Persian "shah-mat," can mean "the king is dead" but can also mean merely "the king is helpless" or "the king is defeated." *The Oxford Companion to Chess*, ed. David Hooper and Kenneth Whyld (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 62.

<sup>43</sup> Stories like *Huon de Bordeaux* and *Garin de Montglane* highlight the masculine aspects of the game. In *Huon de Bordeaux* the hero plays against the Emperor Yvorin's daughter. The Emperor himself has determined the stakes: if Huon wins, he may sleep with the princess; if he loses, he will die. Although the daughter, a master chess player, quickly begins to win, she ultimately falls in love with the hero and throws the game. Nevertheless, Huon rejects the reward, an act that endears him to Yvorin. In *Garin* the eponymous hero arrives at Charlemagne's court, and his reputation as a chess player becomes immediately known. Desiring to test him, Charlemagne proposes a match. If Garin wins, Charlemagne will give him the realm of France and Charlemagne's own wife; if Garin loses the game, he will lose his head. Although Garin wins the game, he wisely declines to accept his prize, settling instead for the town of Montglane (modern day Lyons) as his reward. In both cases chess works to facilitate a male-male bond, uniting men through the sexualized body of a single woman. In both cases the men's relationships work to contain and/or negate female sexual desire.

<sup>44</sup> Perceval's familiarity with the game is also suggestive of a university education. As noted above, chess playing, usually for money, was so popular at urban universities that it was often

reasons for his defeat, he knows that he should not have lost the game even once, much less three times, and the shame he feels prompts him to try to dispose of the pieces: "Et je aie dehait quant jamais moi ne autre cevalier matera ne ne fera honte" (Roach 167) ("And may I have ill fortune but never me nor any other knight will it mate or shame again"; Skeels 22). But his desire to hide the evidence of his mating is thwarted by the appearance of the woman above him. Her position as voyeur reverses the standard trope of woman-as-object, reinforces their confused gender roles, and reveals the public nature of his actions.

Nevertheless, the nature of Perceval's failing—his weakened masculinity and possible feminization—is not fully exposed until his failure at the grail castle. As the silver platter, the lance, and the grail pass in front of him, he becomes puzzled. Yet despite his curiosity, he remains silent: "il li sovint de se mere qui li dist que il ne fust mie trop parlans ne trop demandans des coses. Et por tant si s'en tint que il ne le demanda" (Roach 208) (" . . . he remembered his mother who had told him that he ought not to speak too much and should not inquire too much about things. And therefore he restrained himself and did not ask of it"; Skeels 46). Here Perceval blunders again because of his submission to a woman; his mother has been controlling his actions all along. Her appearance at the end of the scene, like the lady's at the end of the chess match, also suggests an internalized voyeurism. That Perceval is too nervous to pose a question bespeaks his fear that she will either see him in the act of trans-gressing her commands or will learn about his actions later. Unlike the advice Perceval's mother gives her son in Chrétien's *Perceval*, five recommendations with both positive and negative results, this injunction not to speak proves nearly fatal to Perceval's quest.<sup>45</sup>

This advice is not bad merely because of its source; the lesson itself is gendered. The encouragement to be passive and silent contradicts the tenets of knighthood, which call for assertions and shows of strength, and seems far more appropriate for a daughter than for a son. Similar guidance is recorded in early etiquette manuals such as *How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, where the "good wife" counsels girls to "go to the chyrch," watch their speech, "be bothe

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banned. At the colleges in Oxford and Heidelberg, it was forbidden altogether, and in Bologna, students were not allowed to enter gaming houses. However, exceptions to these rules were common. Not only were valuable chessboards sometimes donated to monastic houses, some schools allowed those at the doctoral level to play the game recreationally with other students. See Murray, *A History of Chess*, 441 (see note 5).

<sup>45</sup> An example of the mother's positive instructions (discussed above) in the *Perceval* is her advice to listen to wise men which allows him to learn additional lessons from Gornement. Those familiar with the story will probably know that her recommendation to accept rings from ladies leads to some of Perceval's unchivalric actions and results in something akin to a French bedroom farce.

meke and myld," and "make no jangelynge."<sup>46</sup> Just like a model daughter, Perceval sits demurely at the table in complete passivity.

It is useful to return again to this scene as it appears in Chrétien's poem, which offers an instructive counterpoint. Whereas *Didot* attributes the hero's silence to his mother, the *Perceval* places the blame squarely on Perceval's male teacher, Gornemant. Because of his mentor's advice, Perceval:

Et li vallés les vit passer  
 Ne n'osa mie demander  
 Del graal cui l'en en servoit,  
 Que toz jors en son cuer avoit  
 La parole au pseudome sage. (vv. 3243–47)

[The young man saw the maids' procession  
 and did not dare to ask a question  
 about the grail or whom they served;  
 the wise lord's warning he observed,  
 for he had taken it to heart.]

Here Chrétien posits Perceval's failure to ask about the grail as a problem of male advice rather than of female meddling, and Perceval's *inattention* to women, specifically to his mother, appears to be the cause of his failure. Shortly after he leaves the Fisher King's castle, he meets a damsel (his cousin) in the forest, narrates his adventure, and discovers that his quick departure from home has killed his mother. He also learns that his name is "Perchevax li Galois," a name the woman quickly changes to "Perchevax li chaitis" (3582), or "Perceval the wretch," on account of his mistreatment of his mother.

By contrast when describing this same moment, the *Didot* author highlights the fact that Perceval's knightly training and education, hindered by his mother's injunction, are at fault: "Saces que tu l'as perdu par çou que tu n'es mie si sages ne si preus ne n'as tant fait d'armes ne de proëces ne de biens que tu aies en garde le precieus vaissel" (Roach 211, emphasis added) ("Know that you have failed because you *are not nearly wise enough*, nor worthy, nor have you performed enough deeds of arms or of strength or of good that you may have the keeping of the precious vessel"; Skeels 48–49). Here, Perceval's wisdom, a quality on par with his physical strength and masculinity, is shown to be lacking. Perceval is not yet enough of a man to take over; he must prove his masculinity even further. And while Perceval's mother has died for him, it not because he abandoned her. As Perceval's sister tells him in an earlier episode, she died because Perceval was "de molt povre essiant" (Roach 177)

<sup>46</sup> "How the Good Wife Taught her Daughter," *The Trials and Joys of Marriage*, ed., Eve Salisbury, TEAMS Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), ll. 7, 20, and 22.



("very little schooled"; Skeels 28), and his penance for this death comes long before he arrives at the Fisher King's castle.

Perceval's first step back into the patriarchy is marked by his return to the chessboard castle. Once there, he gives the white stag to the lady but rejects her pleas to stay and become the lord of the realm. The *Didot* author describes the hero's departure at length, and Perceval explains to the lady that he will never stay "que une nuit en un ostel" (Roach 218) ("but one night in a hostel"; Skeels 53). His payment of the stag's head relieving him of his debt, he can now abandon her and her offers of matrimony, a rejection of heterosexual romantic love.<sup>47</sup> His desire for the woman of the chessboard castle is subsequently rewritten as a desire for the grail, a desire that is eventually fulfilled when he returns to his grandfather's castle.

The story's subsequent episodes reaffirm the hero's repudiation of the feminine, his integration into the world of men, and his participation in male homosocial friendship. Returning to his hermit uncle's home, Perceval learns that his sister, who had led the hero to their uncle on his first visit, has died. Again this second scene functions as a contrast, illustrating the hero's development. Perceval and his uncle, initially brought together by their relationship to a woman, no longer need her to facilitate their bond. She is the last of Perceval's female family members to die, and her absence frees the hero from all ties to women. Perceval's masculinity is confirmed for us once more at the second tournament, a testament to his physical strength, which is in turn followed by his second (and final) visit to the Fisher King's castle. This time he poses the question necessary to restore the Fisher King's health and, after the king dies, he becomes the new Fisher King. The table is made whole, the court is reunited when the knights return to Longres, and the land is at peace. Perceval stays on to rule and is later joined by Merlin's male mentor, Blayse, who chooses to remain with him.

In sum, chess in these two versions of the Perceval narrative moves from the periphery to the center. In *Le Conte du Graal* Perceval learns to wear armor, pray, and act the part of a hero, all at a safe distance from any chessboard. His learning is in line with a Bernardian model, in which education primarily consists of mastering spiritual training and its external manifestations. The physical markers of his change and the prominence of his teachers have, as a consequence, provoked numerous articles on Perceval's education in Chrétien's narrative—the hero's change is conspicuous and thus invites commentary. Perceval obtains instruction from several different advisors, models his behavior accordingly, and ends up in a monastery worshipping God. Gawain, who seems to have mastered some of the lessons in courtliness that Perceval initially lacks, nevertheless fails to grow spiritually during the course of his

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<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that Perceval does at one point in his response agree to come back but in the end never returns.

adventures. Admittedly, the poem is incomplete and thus it is impossible to know what exactly Chrétien envisioned for this knight. Yet given the parts of the narrative that do exist, it is clear that the chess set Gawain encounters is not a tool for education but rather a marker of failure. Indeed, Gawain's use of the set as a weapon either demonstrates his lack of understanding of the game or the game's inherent uselessness as anything more than a weapon. Ultimately, the board and the pieces prove insufficient in the face of the attacking mob, in this case people who have a legitimate grievance against the knight fighting against them.

By contrast the *Didot Perceval*, written only thirty to forty years after Chrétien's poem, places chess at the heart of the hero's education, and the story's pedagogical model features repetition, individual trials, intellectual growth, and rejection of the feminine. That Perceval visits the same places twice, and that these visits constitute the basis of his training, has made it difficult for readers like Cosman, who sees this repetition as the mark of defective plot structure, to identify specific moments of the hero's training.<sup>48</sup> Yet this later story's interest in pedagogy is neither less present nor less important than Chrétien's. In lieu of strong teaching figures the Didot author highlights Perceval's own growing understanding of his identity and his ability. And while moral growth is still the goal, this growth comes through the mastery of rational action, a mastery that is gained through, among other things, the repeated playing of chess. It does not come from changing one's clothes.

This change in the depiction of Perceval's training allows us to trace scholasticism's growing influence on literary texts and, most likely, on the culture at large. But perhaps more importantly, these two stories throw into relief the ties between scholastic inquiry and the thirteenth century's increased misogyny. This is perhaps not surprising—the scholastic movement saw reason as a faculty that rose above the material world, and women served as problematic emblems of the physical.<sup>49</sup> Yet the changing structure of the Perceval legend

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<sup>48</sup> After furnishing an impressive list of analogs to Chrétien's *Perceval*, Cosman notes that in "every other version of Perceval's education, including Wolfram [von Eschenbach]'s, there is a specific Instruction [sic] scene." Nevertheless, she treats these later tales as redactions of Chrétien's poem and dismisses most of them as lacking any significant portrayal of knightly instruction (Cosman, *The Education of the Hero*, 53 [see note 11]). Cosman refers to the authors of these later texts as "imitators" of Chrétien, a pejorative word that reveals a tendency to read such stories as attempts to copy the style of *Le Conte du Graal* rather than alter or update the story to reflect new cultural models.

<sup>49</sup> The most extreme example of such thinking is found in the medical literature of the period. Although not homogenous across Europe, theories of human reproduction included the idea that male seed was largely responsible for the form of the offspring while the female body provided the matter. This very theory was put forth by Albertus Magnus, and advocate of experimental science and one of the early proponents of scholastic inquiry, in his *questiones* on Aristotle's *On Animals*. See Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine*,

gives us a better idea of the shape of such misogynist discourse. Rather than arguing (as many medieval texts do) that women are a bad influence, or that men are superior, it subtly aligns education with abstract thought, a connection that in turn relies on a rejection of the women, whose bodiliness can only drag men away from higher truth.

Neither the alignment of chess with abstract thought, nor the alignment of abstract thought and masculinity, has entirely disappeared to this day. In May 2007 the *New York Times* ran an article on the elementary, junior high, and senior high school chess championships that had been held earlier that year, and its publication testifies to the popularity of chess as part of in-school and after-school curricula.<sup>50</sup> Groups like Chess-in-the-Schools, the Berkeley Chess School, and America's Foundation for Chess, who promote the game in schools, all emphasize the game's connection to abstract reasoning and intellectual growth.<sup>51</sup> Yet while the language used by these groups is inclusive and does not discriminate by sex, the fact is that only 1% of current chess grandmasters are men, and the overwhelming stereotype is that men are inherently better chess players. As noted on many an amateur blog, men are better chess players because

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*Science, and Culture*. Cambridge History of Medicine (Cambridge, New York, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 121.

<sup>50</sup> See Dylan Loeb McClain, "Where's the Real Action Now? In the Nation's School Rooms," *New York Times*, May 20, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/20/crosswords/chess/20chess.html>, last accessed March 15, 2011. Perhaps as a means to justify covering chess championships for kids, the article also notes that close to sixty percent of the United States Chess Federation's members are now under the age of 18.

<sup>51</sup> All of these groups promote the game as a means for intellectual development, and most also have mission statements that promote the playing of chess as a means for moral, social, and academic improvement. Chess-in-the-Schools cites studies to support its activities on iyd website: "In 1991 and 1996, Stuart M. Margulies, Ph.D., a noted educational psychologist, conducted two studies examining the effects of chess on children's reading scores. The studies demonstrated that students who participated in the chess program showed improved scores on standardized tests. The gains were even greater among children with low or average initial scores. Children who were in the non-chess playing control group showed no gains." See <http://www.chessintheschools.org/s/index.cfm?SSID=3>, last accessed on March 15, 2011. Other foundations use unnamed studies to make a similar claim: "Studies have been done in various locations around the United States and Canada, showing that chess results in increased scores on standardized tests for both reading and math. A study on a large scale chess program in New York City, which involved more than 100 schools and 3,000 children, showed higher classroom grades in both English and Math for children involved in chess. Studies in Houston, Texas and Bradford, Pennsylvania showed chess leads to higher scores on the Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal and the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking." <http://www.championshipchess.net/inSchool.html>, last accessed March 15, 2011). Even the Berkeley Chess School, a group with a more fuzzy, feel-good goal than most others cannot resist adding, on its "Why Chess" page that "new evidence suggests chess is one of history's most valuable educational tools." <http://www.berkeleychessschool.org/> (last accessed March 15, 2011).

their brains are “wired differently.”<sup>52</sup> The very publication of *Chess Bitch: Women in the Ultimate Intellectual Sport*, a depiction of the way women are “successfully knocking down the doors to this traditionally male game, infiltrating the male-owned sporting subculture of international chess, and giving the phrase ‘play like a girl’ a whole new meaning” captures both the way chess is conceived of as not only an intellectual exercise of men along—otherwise, women would not feel the need to “infiltrate” it or start “knocking down the doors” to get in.<sup>53</sup> Playfulness aside, Jennifer Shahade’s adoption of the title “Bitch” reveals tons about the perception of women as emotionally unfit to play chess and thus justly deserving of their role in the margins of a masculine sport, one that continues to champion rationality, dispassionate action, and abstract thought.

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<sup>52</sup> This attitude is represented on numerous blogs and in various discussion groups. For an opposing view, see a recent study by Christopher F. Chabris and Mark E. Glickman, who use statistics to demonstrate that the discrepancies between male and female performance stem from the fact that many more boys enter the game at the lower levels. “Sex Differences in Intellectual Performance: Analysis of a Large Cohort of Competitive Chess Players,” *Psychological Science* 17.12 (2006): 1040–46.

<sup>53</sup> Jennifer Shahade, *Chess Bitch: Women in the Ultimate Intellectual Sport* (Los Angeles: Siles Press, 2005). This quote is from the official description of the book found on Amazon.com and on Jennifer Shadade’s own website: <http://www.jennifershahade.com/chessbitchreview.html> (last accessed March 15, 2011).

## Chapter 6

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### Images of Medieval Spanish Chess and Captive Damsels in Distress<sup>1</sup>

Two of Spain's earliest painted representations of the game of chess use the game as an erotic metaphor of courtly love which mirrors the political and cultural climate in which they were created. This essay's analysis of each scene's setting and symbols demonstrates how the playful imagery of these two medieval artworks illustrates that paradoxical moment in courtly love when a heroic knight rescues a damsel in distress, thus releasing her from a wrongful captor and at the same time capturing her and her love for himself. In each case, the Spanish image shows the *dama acuitada*'s release as secured via her hero's defeat of her alien, foreign and very often Moorish captor, by means of yet another capture of some type—either her knight in shining armor defeats his romantic rival at chess or else he excels at the hunt, a capture-based competition akin to chess, leaving the traditionally metaphorical game for play between the lovers. This pattern of conquest and reconquest, of property hostilely taken then lovingly recaptured, parallels the themes seen on contemporary carved caskets as well as the history of territory invaded by the Moors and recaptured by the Spanish during the Reconquest (711–1492), the time and place both these paintings appear.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to dedicate this study to Alan Roy Macier (1963–2010), “Tal jugador de tablas non avía en toda España.”

<sup>2</sup> This study rests on the fundamental research of Roger Sherman Loomis, Jerrilynn Dodds, Carmen Bernis, Olivia Remie Constable and James A. Rushing while offering new insights into the chivalric aspects, ludic details, and historical context which have previously eluded identification or interpretation: Roger Sherman Loomis, “A Phantom Tale of Ingratitude,” *Modern Philology* XIV (1916–17): 751–55; Jerrilynn D. Dodds, “The Paintings in the *Sala de Justicia* of the Alhambra: Iconography and Iconology,” *Art Bulletin* 61 (1979): 186–97; Carmen

The earlier of the two chess paintings which are of interest to this study appears in the first and largest treatise of Alfonso X el Sabio's lavishly illuminated *Libros de acedrex dados e tablas* or *Libro de juegos* [*Books of Chess Dice and Tables* or *Book of Games*, hereafter as *LJ*], completed in Seville in 1283. The miniature on fol. 12v of the "Libro del acedrex," which shows a maiden observing a chess game from a tower, may very likely be the earliest known image of the legend of Flores and Blancaflor. Specifically, it illustrates the episode where the hero secures his beloved's release from the king of Babylonia by winning the chess game, upon which her fate hinges, against her tower's guard whose weakness (in both senses of the word, preference and lack of skill) just happens to be that very game.

The more recent painting concerning this study dates from approximately a century later and appears among the courtly scenes painted on leather, inside the domes of the lateral cupolas of the *Sala de los reyes* (or *Sala de justicia*) of the Alhambra Palace in Granada. In this room's southern cupola, known as Lateral 1, a very European-looking blonde maiden plays chess with a similarly blond European knight; notably she does not play with either the turbaned Moor or the hairy wild man (known variously by the terms "wodehouse" and "woodwose," and discussed in detail below) who also appear in this cupola. Despite Loomis's identification of the hairy wild man as it relates to similar scenes found in the marginalia of early fourteenth-century texts and also in carvings on fourteenth-century French so-called marriage caskets, and despite the comparison of those caskets by Dodds to several other scenes shown in the Alhambra's cupolas, these images along with their sources and contextual message have evaded full interpretation. This study reveals the hidden allegorical and amorous significance of the Alhambra's Gothic art by exploring the meaning behind the relationship of its chess-rescue painting with that of the *LJ*, in the context of the images of chivalric capture on the betrothal caskets and the historical background of Spain's Reconquest.

Since the arrival of the game of chess in medieval Europe, literary and plastic artists and artisans have employed it as a metaphor of courtly seduction, in the form of the ritualistic battle between the sexes in the art of courtly love. Written examples include the French poem about Huon de Bordeaux ca. 1200, in which the prize of winning a chess game against a Moorish maiden who has yet to know defeat is to bed her; the shipboard chess game played with the aid of a love draught in *Tristan and Isolde* by Gottfried von Strassburg (thir-

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Bernis, "Las pinturas de la Sala de los reyes de la Alhambra: Los asuntos, los trajes, la fecha," *Cuadernos de la Alhambra* 18 (1982): 21–50; Olivia Remie Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture in Medieval Castile: The *Libro de Ajedrez* of Alfonso X, el Sabio," *Speculum* 82.2 (April 2007): 301–47; and James A. Rushing "Adventure in the Service of Love: Yvain on a Fourteenth-Century Ivory Panel," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 61.1 (1998): 55–65.

teenth-century Germany); and the allegorical *Les Echés amoureux* (fourteenth-century France). Within the realm of Arabic chess legend, there are also famous tales of love saving players from almost certainly doomed chess games, and thus also rescuing the ladies wagered in them, such as the famous one named after the maiden Dilaram.<sup>3</sup>

Scenes of lovers playing chess survive on numerous carved ivory and wooden articles including tablet writing covers; murals, manuscript miniatures, embroidery, misericords or choir seats; tapestries, chests, combs, and notably mirrors and small caskets.<sup>4</sup> Sexually suggestive chess scenes appear on two such mirror backs, London's Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), item #803–1891, and Paris's Musée du Louvre, item OA 117.<sup>5</sup> Fundamental to the present study are the somewhat more common carved ivory or wooden small caskets, some of which are also known as *coffrets composites*, due to their mixture of episodes from various legends and tales of chivalry.<sup>6</sup> Caskets displaying chess scenes include the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art's casket K. 1287 and item A 318, a fourteenth-century German ivory casket in the collection of the Kunstgewerbemuseum of Cologne.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> H. J. R. Murray gives a definitive account of this lovers' chess problem and its history in *A History of Chess* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 311–12.

<sup>4</sup> David J. A. Ross, "Allegory and Romance on a Mediaeval French Marriage Casket," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 11 (1948): 112–42; here 116. See also Bernis, "Las pinturas," 24 (see note 2).

<sup>5</sup> Images of V&A #803–1891 appear in Colleen Schaforth, *The Art of Chess* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 52, and on the cover of April 2003 *Speculum*; the Louvre's OA 117 may be seen in Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 29, fig. c; Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 124, fig. 110; and Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture," 328, fig. 11 and 328, note 77 (see note 2).

<sup>6</sup> Although some caskets illustrate scenes entirely from one tale, *coffrets composites* contain an assortment of the following "courtly love-making" (Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 112 [see note 4]) scenes from various popular chivalric legends and romantic allegory (Thomas T. Hoopes, "An Ivory Casket in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *The Art Bulletin* 8.3 [March 1926]: 127–39; here 127), most of which appear in one guise or another in the two cupolas of the Alhambra: the jousting tournament; the siege of the Castle of Love (cf. *Don Quijote* 2, 20 [Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 70 note 52]); Aristotle and Phyllis; Virgil in the basket; the Fountain of Youth; Pyramus and Thisbe; Galahad receiving the key to the *Château des Pucelles*; Gawain fighting a (what later proves to be a phantom) lion; Lancelot crossing sword bridge to rescue abducted Guinevere; Gawain on the Bed of Peril and then releasing imprisoned maidens from the *Château Merveil*; Tristan and Isolde in the garden with King Mark eavesdropping from the tree; a virgin used by a man to lure unicorn to his death; and Enyas with a wild man. The definitive reference is Raymond Koechlin, *Les Ivoires gothiques français*, 3 vols. (Paris: Picard, 1924). Useful lists of known extant complete caskets and fragments appear in Hoopes, "An Ivory Casket," 127 (see above) and Rushing, "Adventure," 58–59 note 18 (see note 2).

<sup>7</sup> Casket K. 1287 may be seen in Ross, "Allegory and Romance," pl. 25 fig. a, second scene from left in the center row (see note 4); A 318 appears in Timothy Husband, *The Wild Man: Medieval*

Of similar materials and style to the aforementioned furnishings is the exceptional, late fifteenth-century game board from Burgundy and now item 155C at the Museo Nazionale del Bargello of Florence, Italy.<sup>8</sup> This beautifully inlaid wood and ivory masterpiece features a chessboard on one side and a backgammon board on the other. It is hinged to fold in half for storage and thus is in itself a box. Carved ivory borders on both sides are replete with exquisitely carved battle scenes of the manly pursuits of jousting with their “immensely long lances” along the solid sides and disporting with ladies along the hinged sides.<sup>9</sup> Its backgammon side shows a couple playing chess beside a lion-headed fountain. The gentleman’s protective gesture towards his lone piece and the position of those chessmen near the lady seem to show her having outnumbered and perhaps checkmated her opponent. The close relationship between these objects of the plastic arts and the love-capture theme of the both Alhambra’s cupola paintings, even down to individual postures, will be examined in detail below and will thematically unite all these medieval representations of chess via their motif of love as a symbolic capture for the purpose of romantic rescue.

### Flores and Blancaflor in Alfonso’s “Libro del acedrex”

From the upper story of the building forming the backwards L-shaped miniature of the *LJ*’s fol. 12v, a blonde maiden with flowing tresses watches a game of chess between two men on the ground floor.<sup>10</sup> Both players are tonsured men dressed as clerics but behind each stands a sword, which at first seems incongruous to their profession. Between the two players is an upright and outsized chessboard which all but covers the tower’s door. This particular chess game shown, the eleventh of 103 end-game problems in the “Libro del acedrex,” is won by the player of the white pieces, seated at left, who is about

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*Myth and Symbolism* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980), fig. 50 on what he says is the lid, but appears instead to be an end panel.

<sup>8</sup> For detailed images see Alessandro Sanvito, *Scacchi e Tavole da Gioco: Nella Collezione Carrand. Specchio del Bargello*, 47 (Firenze: Museo Nazionale del Bargello, 2000), here 16. I am indebted to Alessandro Sanvito and Gianfelice Ferlito for their generous assistance to me in researching this chessboard.

<sup>9</sup> Camille, *The Medieval Art*, 124 (see note 5). Camille also offers an image of the chess side of this game board on 125, fig. 111.

<sup>10</sup> The original manuscript T.I.6 is held at the Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial. A facsimile also exists: Alfonso X, el Sabio, *Libros del ajedrez, dados y tablas de Alfonso X. Ed. facsimil* (Madrid: Poniente; Valencia: García, 1987), 1: fol. 12v. In addition to the print sources given for each work of art discussed, high-resolution and color images may be found for many of them online.



to receive his reward of refreshments from the smaller or perhaps younger servant at far left, and upon whom the lady in the tower fixes her gaze. The high percentage of captures in this short game is entirely in keeping with this study's theme of captive maidens: five captures are possible within its twelve moves, resulting in an average of almost one capture for every two moves.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, the *LJ* also contains a compulsory-capture chess variant which carries out the same connection between chess, maidens and captivity in its name; it is called either *el iuego forçado* [the forced game] due to its capture rule or *el iuego de las donzellas* [the game of the maidens] because it was said to be invented by maidens overseas (fol. 4v), perhaps to while away their captive hours, and the game's miniature portrays very European-looking fair-headed maidens (fol. 5r).

The *LJ*'s fol. 12v may well illustrate that pivotal chess game in which Flores defeats his captive lover's prison guard (the losing player of the black pieces at right) because both its chess problem and its artistic presentation coincide perfectly with the episode as described in Ch. 31 of Sancho IV's continuation of his father Alfonso X's *General estoria*. In the tale, the hero Flores is the son of Spanish King Fenis and he gallantly rescues his beloved Blancaflor from the king of Babylonia.<sup>12</sup> Flores is advised by Don Daytes (or Gaytes) and his wife Licores that the man who guards the door to where Blancaflor is being held is "*vn omne que ha grand sabor de jugar las tablas & el axedrez ... E commo qujer queel ha muy grande sabor desto non es maestro de jugar*" ["a man who loves to play tables and chess ... and even though he loves it, he is not a master player"].<sup>13</sup> Olivia Remie Constable first tentatively suggests this same identification for the figures in fol. 12v's miniature on the basis of Patricia Grieve's work connecting the legend of Flores and Blancaflor to an early Spanish version of the legend but then she dismisses the idea owing to the equal appearance of the two men playing chess and the fact that the woman

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed description of this problem's opening arrangement and solution please see my dissertation, "Los libros de acedrex dados e tablas: Historical, Artistic and Metaphysical Dimensions of Alfonso X's *Book of Games*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 2007), 200–02. The resulting capture-to-move ratio of 5:12 or 41.66% is higher than the *LJ* average, which is just over one capture every third move (33.81%, calculated by dividing the average number of moves per problem in the *LJ* by the average number of captures per problem, 2.3:~6.8).

<sup>12</sup> The legendary family tree of Flores and Blancaflor produces another famous patron of the game of chess in addition to Flores. Their daughter Bertha's marriage to Pepin the Short, King of the Franks, ultimately produced a grandson with a legendary interest in chess, Charlemagne (742–814).

<sup>13</sup> David Arbesú Fernández, ed., *Texto y concordancias de la Crónica de Flores y Blancaflor* (Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid 7583). Spanish Series, 89 (New York: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 2005), fol. 25r. The unusual order of these two games here is the same used by Alfonso in his description of his own father's gaming prowess in the *Setenario*'s Law VII.

does not necessarily appear to be incarcerated.<sup>14</sup> However, in light of the nature of the chess problem shown, the architecture of the miniature's window and door, and the fact that the entire image reflects the plot of the episode within the *General estoria*, it indeed appears that her first instinct was correct and that the woman is Blancaflor.

The artistic detail which most strongly supports Blancaflor's identification is the window in which she appears. Alfonso's miniaturists strove for realism in many unprecedented regards but at times their lack of knowledge about a distant land or people resulted in confused or mistaken portrayals, one example being the light-skinned Indians of various hair colors on fols. 2r and 2v. So although it is true that both the players have the appearance of tonsured Christian clerics, their Crusader's swords and the miniature's relatively exotic architecture may speak more to its locale than either player's appearance. Throughout the *LJ*, a great variety of architecture is used to suggest various settings from gardens to Moorish battle tents, and from native to foreign styles of buildings. Here, the *LJ* miniaturist has cleverly implied that the setting is the land of the Crusades via the men's swords and also suggested a Moorish architecture with the blinds on the window beside the maiden. These jalousies or *persianas* covered the windows in areas of Muslim palaces where harems were kept, such as those pierced in complex geometric patterns on the upper-floor windows of the Alhambra's courtyards, in order to allow air to circulate and women to look out without male guests being able to see and covet them. However, blinds purposefully cover only one half of this miniature's window, allowing the dual function of suggesting that the window may have been screened while also that of displaying the maiden. Indeed it would have been at narrative and artistic cross-purposes to make this lady altogether invisible behind a realistic presentation of such an opaque barrier. Significantly, no similar window treatment appears in the *LJ*, either for upper or lower floors, including windows in other L-shaped *LJ* miniatures of fols. 7r and 15r, whose upper Gothic-style arches are uninhabited.

The second key aspect of the miniature, the one illustrating the incarceration of the lady, is the proportionately outsize chessboard on which the two men play. Although the lady is not visibly restrained by shackles or chains, her inability to run away from her fate to be determined by the two chess players is clearly communicated by her exit being sealed by the chessboard. While the board's size and orientation is the same as in all other *LJ* miniatures and there are many doors both open and closed depicted in them, none of the other doorways is blockaded in this manner. This board effectively blocks the tower's

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<sup>14</sup> Constable, "Chess and Courtly Culture," 329–30, fig. 12 and note 81 (see note 2), referencing Patricia Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflor and the European Romance*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 32 (Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 67–69.

doorway to the point that only its uppermost portion is visible beyond the top edge of the game table. The depiction of the lintel of the door in this image is further unique in that no other tower portrayed in the L-shaped miniatures has such a doorway. The uniqueness of the combination of the architectural feature of the doorway impeded by the chessboard therefore cannot be seen as accidental and must relate to the plot of this specific love story. There is no other reason to show a doorway behind the board. Further, the gesture of the losing player, upwards towards the woman watching the game, echoes others in the "*Libro del acedrex*" used by other losing players to indicate the spoils won by their opponents, such as drinks or delicacies, and more importantly, by players to indicate other more valuable articles forfeited in bets, as in the dice games on fols. 67v and 69v of the "*Libro de los dados*." The betting of a woman in a game is a frequent topos occurring in the famed Dilaram problem (variations seen in the *LJ* Problems 52, 54, 57, 62, 68, and 90), in which the game's wager is the very wife for whom the problem is named, and in Spanish literature. Ángela de Acevedo's Golden Age drama *Dicha y desdicha del juego y devoción a la Virgen* and José de Espronceda's nineteenth-century poem *El Estudiante de Salamanca* are two examples which employ the plot device of betting and losing with a woman's portrait, as a playing card representative of her person, in a card game. The theme also figures in Édouard Lalo's nineteenth-century ballet *Namouna*, wherein the title character is a slave girl who, wagered and lost by her owner in a game of dice, ultimately falls in love with the winner who grants her freedom.

More compelling evidence that these are likely to be Flores and Blancaflor, however, is that close correspondence between the Sancho IV's textual description of the sole chess scene in this love story, in his continuation of his father's *General estoria*, and this miniature in the father's *chef d'oeuvre* on the game. Such a story establishing the genealogy of the Spanish throne as linked to a chess-player who bested an Arab opponent for a woman would have appealed personally and politically to Alfonso, who of course had vested interests in the Reconquest of Spain from the Moors as well as known fondness for chess and ladies. Although we lack conclusive evidence that Alfonso knew of the legend of Flores and Blancaflor, its appearance in both works would be quite a notable coincidence in the face of the abundant ludic and visual correspondences cited. It is therefore plausible to suggest that Alfonso had known of the tale of Flores and Blancaflor in some form, and that his miniaturists portrayed its climax as the basis of one of the 151 illuminations in his landmark tome on games.

As with the Alhambra's chess scene, addressed in detail below, there is something unusual in the appearance of this fictional or legendary tale within the predominantly factual and realistic *LJ*. Its game scenes frequently display

known and identifiable people from real life playing known and playable games from earlier textual sources. Indeed, the *LJ*'s illuminations contain a very early, perhaps earliest known, usage of realism in painted portraiture to record King Alfonso X and other historical figures from his court and chess history.<sup>15</sup> Of course it is possible for both fictitious and historical characters to appear together within one scene, however this tends not to be so in the *LJ*. In this miniature, however, the characters playing the game are fictional, or at least now held to be legendary, and the sources we have regarding their tale do not preserve details of the three games Flores plays against the tower guard. Perhaps their inclusion shows that Sancho IV and his father believed them to be real historical individuals. In any case, fol. 12v's legendary characters then stand out in notable contrast to the work's larger focus on realism and chess history, by displaying a miniature whose reference to an oral or literary tradition is unexpected within the *LJ*'s larger non-fictional context.

### The Chess Cupola of Alhambra's *Sala de los reyes*

The theme of love as capture in terms of liberating a damsel in distress from her Moorish captor thematically unites the Alfonsine miniature discussed above with the chess painting found in the Alhambra. The Alhambra's chess scene appears as one scene among many erotically-charged captures within the larger context of one of the three painted cupolas in that palace's *Sala de los reyes* [Hall of Kings]. Carmen Bernis dates these leather paintings to the 1380s and Michael Jacobs calls them "the most important figurative decorations to be found in Islamic Spain."<sup>16</sup> Both lateral cupolas portray Moors together with European Christians, and one typically lecherous hairy wild man in Lateral 1. Their appearance in the Moorish Palace's paintings confounds "[p]opular misconceptions about the total prohibition of figures in Islamic art."<sup>17</sup> Bernis explains:

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<sup>15</sup> The artistic and symbolic dimensions of the *LJ* are explored in depth and respectively in Chapters II and III of the author's dissertation.

<sup>16</sup> Bernis, "Las pinturas," 22 (see note 2) and Michael Jacobs, *Alhambra* (New York: Rizzoli, 2000), 124. Perhaps the best images of these cupolas in print are to be found in Jesús Bermúdez López, *The Alhambra and the Generalife: Official Guide* (Madrid: TF, 2010). Small but high-quality color images of all three cupolas appear in Jacobs, *Alhambra*, 127. A black-and-white image of the chess portion of the cupola appears in Angus Kay, "The Late Middle Ages," *Spain: A History*, ed. Raymond Carr (Oxford, New York, Athens: Oxford University Press, 2000), 96–97 (image credit given to Institut Amatlet d'Art Hispànic [299]). Another color image, perhaps retouched, appears in Jerry Mason, ed., *The World of Chess* (New York and Toronto: Random House, 1974), 62–63.

<sup>17</sup> Jacobs, *Alhambra*, 124 (see note 16).

su presencia en un palacio musulmán, que a algunos sorprende, viene a ser un testimonio más, entre otros muchos, de los numerosos intercambios que entonces se daban entre los moros y los cristianos españoles. Conocido es el texto de Ibn Jaldun, contemporáneo de estas pinturas, donde cuenta que los musulmanes andaluces, por influjo de los cristianos fronterizos, adoptaron la costumbre de decorar sus casas y sus palacios con pinturas de figuras humanas.

[their presence in a Muslim palace, which surprises some, turns out to be yet another testimony, among many, of the numerous exchanges which occurred at that time between Spanish Moors and Christians. Well known is Ibn Jaldun's text, contemporary to these paintings, where it tells how the Andalusian Muslims, influenced by the bordering Christians, adopted the custom of decorating their houses and palaces with paintings of human figures.]<sup>18</sup>

Despite their imperfect fit with supposed Koranic prohibitions against the representation of human figures, these paintings are cunningly suited to the architectural space in which they were placed. The figures of each cupola appear to gather around "in the space below the dome," exactly in the recesses at the back of each chamber beneath these paintings "where the sultan and his guests would have sat while attending the banquets and other festivities probably held there."<sup>19</sup> Lamentably, their state of deterioration is obvious in all known photographs of these paintings but the finer details are clarified in excellent line sketches by Bernis.

Directly off the Court of the Lions (named for its famous twelve-lion fountain, which may have been inspired by scenes of lion-mouthed fountains on caskets and similar articles) ringing the central dome are portraits of ten seated Nasrid Arab rulers of Granada.<sup>20</sup> The cupola of the southern vault, known as Lateral 1, contains the chess scene of interest to this study and is analyzed in depth below. First, however, our understanding of the non-narrative paintings of that cupola benefit from by comparing and contrasting them with the coded ones of the historiated northern vault (Lateral 2) and the *coffrets composites*. The conflicting dual readings possible in Lateral 2's narrative of a hunting competition between the Moor and the Christian enables an easier comprehension of the more complex and ambivalent symbols of the non-narrative cupola in which the chess game appears.

In Lateral 2, a turbaned Moor and a bare-headed Christian knight kill wild beasts for their fair ladies. The cycle for each hunter reads around opposing halves of the dome, beginning in the center of one long side at a fountain with lion-head spouts.<sup>21</sup> Moving counterclockwise around one half of the oval, a mounted Arab

<sup>18</sup> Bernis, "Las pinturas," 22 (see note 2).

<sup>19</sup> Dodds, "The paintings," 195 (see note 2) and Jacobs, *Alhambra*, 127 (see note 16).

<sup>20</sup> An image of the central dome's painting appears in Dodds, "The paintings," 24 (see note 2) and two kings from the central cupola also appear in Bradley Smith, *Spain: A History in Art* (Garden City, NY: Gemini-Smith/Doubleday and Company, 1971), 98.

<sup>21</sup> Dodds identifies the fountain scene in Lateral 2 as Tristan and Isolde's tryst beneath the tree but finds the scene "confused by a number of tiny naked people who bathe in the fountain,

stabs a hispid boar, then with the help of several other men loads the slain swine onto a beast of burden, and finally, stands with his fellows to present it to the beautiful maiden. On the opposite half of the same dome, now moving clockwise away from the fountain, a mounted Christian knight stabs a bear while another man, in a costume of many buttons, stands on tiptoe to deliver the *coup de grâce* to the lion stabbed by a hooded man on horseback. Behind the latter, archers string their bows.<sup>22</sup> The two fair-haired damsels, for whom the hunt is conducted, stand back to back on the long side of the cupola opposite the fountain, each to receive the noble prey her suitor has brought: Moorish boar and Christian bear. It is likely not a coincidence that these kills correspond respectively to Scenes 3 and 4 of Lateral 1, in which a Christian kills a bear and a boar is brought down by dogs beneath the horse's hooves of the jousting Moor.

Underscoring the competitive sexuality which charges these scenes are the manifest genitalia of the all male horses and their tails tightly knotted as though prepared for battle. Multiple levels of the capture theme are evident here. Not only are there the obvious captures of the animals by the men in the hunt but also the men seek to capture the women's affection and thus the women through these deeds. These scenes clearly show a logical narrative in which this hunt is a competition between the two men and thus the viewer is left to decode the symbols to decide which of the two men is the victor, either the Christian on the right kneeling reverently before his lady while holding the bear's paw or the Moor on the left standing and pointing masterfully down at his kill.

This painting, like any other art, is a mirror which can reflect the views of the observer back to himself, and thus shows the Moor in a way which would likely have pleased its Moorish patron while at the same time showing the Christian in a way which would please followers of chivalry. On the basis of the European style of their art, one might expect this cupola to display a clear preference for the European knight and the courtly mode of love which made men willing servants of their beloveds. However their presence in the Alhambra clouds this issue because it seems that sensitivity to his Moorish patron may have moved the artist to allow a dual reading of this hunt.<sup>23</sup> It is using this pro-Moor or anti-chivalrous perspective that Dodds reads the Moor's proud stance before his lady as victorious over the pathetic groveling posture

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between the lovers" and thus concludes that "[t]he significance of the scene seems, however, to have been lost." However, since no eavesdropping husband looms in the tree as in the casket models (such as K. 1284), her second identification of a "condensed version of the Fountain of Youth" is more accurate ("The paintings," 191 [see note 2]).

<sup>22</sup> See Dodds, "The paintings," fig. 4 (see note 2). The long braids of these men resemble those of the archers in the *LJ* (fols. 11v and 91v), but their ethnicity remains unclear.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion on the nationality of the Alhambra's painters, see Jacobs, *Alhambra*, 124 (see note 16) and Dodds, "The paintings," 188 (see note 2).

of the Christian, perhaps exactly as the patron was meant to read the gestures.<sup>24</sup> The artist may have felt that showing the humiliating and emasculating nature of chivalry from the man's perspective, in which the man served his lady as his master or *midons*, was enough to confirm its inferiority to his patron's culture. However, the possibility also exists that the painter's sympathies lay more with the European sources of the art he painted than with his Moorish patrons and thus he showed the Moor breaking the chivalric code in a way which would have seemed superior only to his patron. Understanding that the code of chivalry requires a lover submissively to serve his lady as his superior, it seems to be the Christian knight of the Alhambra rather than the Moor who wins the favor of his fair lady. Although such an outcome would be no surprise in a Christian setting, it, like the appearance of Flores and Blancaflor in the *LJ*, is unexpected in this setting.<sup>25</sup>

From the pro-chivalric perspective, one notes a marked contrast in the reactions of the painted audiences to each hunter. The Christian holds the animal's paw as he looks up at his lady, as though begging for her hand, and she, who holds a tamed bird in her right hand, points to him with her free hand. As though humbly confirming her meaning, he gestures to himself while on the Moor's side everyone points only to the dead animal, which is clearly not the winner in any sense. This non-verbal communication hints at a victory in one of two scenarios. Either the victory is one for the lady, who wins the food or the lover; or the scene foregrounds the two items captured, which in the Moor's case is the animal he killed but likely is prohibited by his religion from eating, while the Christian Knight captured the greater reward of the lady's heart. In sum, Lateral 2 contains complex and ambivalent symbols, which can be interpreted as a rather unexpected preference for the Christian knight over the Arab one, given the context added by the painting's architectural location, and which serve to support similar conclusions about the Christian knight's victory in the games of Lateral 1.

Like Lateral 2, Lateral 1 contains scenes painted in the European Gothic style and courtly figures enacting scenes which illustrate variations on the theme of love as capture. However, the cupolas differ in that the representative, rather than narrative, art of Lateral 1 contains isolated scenes or episodes from a number of tales, a cupola *composite* if you will, and not a sequence of related and logically articulated episodes of narrative art as in Lateral 2's hunts. Beginning at its chess game and moving clockwise, Lateral 1's oval dome contains the following seven capture scenarios, addressed in greater detail below: (1) a chess game between a Christian man and a Christian maiden, (2) a Christian knight vs. a lion, (3) a mounted knight vs. a bear, (4) a Moor vs. a

<sup>24</sup> Dodds, "The paintings," 195 (see note 2).

<sup>25</sup> Bernis, "Las pinturas," 26 (see note 2).

Christian, (5) a captive maiden watching the combat of the previous scene, (6) a Christian vs. a wild man, and (7) a Moor vs. a deer. Surrounding the seven key scenes are images reminiscent of those found on medieval tapestries, all of which comprise an earthly paradise in which dogs chase rabbits through a great variety of fruited or flowering trees which house a number of realistic and identifiable birds.<sup>26</sup> The background, like that of the *LJ*, is a uniform blue and the linear Gothic style of painting also resembles that of the *LJ*, with its heavy outlines of roughly sketched figures and without much depth of perspective.<sup>27</sup>

As one looks up at them, the arrangement of Lateral 1's seven scenes results in a whirling sense of movement around the cupola. Alternating wide areas of tranquil tableaux with narrow areas of tightly compacted energy create an exciting sense of rhythm in a whipping rotation around the red center of its starry dome. Centered on the two longer sides of the Lateral 1's oval-shaped cupola are the serene scenes which both contain a fair maiden and a castle. Occupying the two shorter ends of the cupola's oval are the dynamic vignettes of men on horseback, either fighting or hunting, which are shown compactly in the tighter curves at the ends of the oval. This distribution supports the hypothesis that the dome's usage of space, like its scenes, may also have been modeled on the caskets, which would invite the beholder to turn them to view the artwork on each side. Indeed, the presence of this style of painting here may be a sophisticated play on etymology. Both items, the small caskets or *coffrets* and the painted dome, share etymological roots in the term *coffer*, one sense of which refers to a sunken panel of a painting within a dome or vault. At first the sense of movement conveyed by these courtly tableaux suggests that each leads logically from one into the next, somewhat like Lateral 2's hunting competition, and thus the cupola seems to beg a narrative interpretation. However, investigation into the sources of these scenes explains why this tempting suggestion is as impossible and inappropriate for the Alhambra as for the *coffrets composites*.

Researching the scenes in the Alhambra's chess cupola and particularly its image of the wild man of Scene 6 led to the work of Roger Sherman Loomis and other studies of the small caskets mentioned above. These caskets frequently contained representative art, that is a non-narrative arrangement of scenes, whose figures and scenes correspond directly with nearly every figure and scene in the Alhambra's lateral cupolas, and moreover, that all scenes overwhelmingly shared the same theme of captivity and liberation as seen in Flores and Blancaflor. Further, the caskets, cupolas and *LJ* all share the theme of chess. One of the most striking features of these artworks is the similarity between not only

<sup>26</sup> Bernis, "Las pinturas," 25 and Dodds, "The paintings," 190 (see note 2). Cf. the realistic animals identified in Richard P. Kinkade's "Myth and Reality in the Miracle of *Cantiga* 29," *La corónica* 28.1 (1999): 35–69.

<sup>27</sup> Bernis, "Las pinturas," 23 (see note 2).



the underlying themes of capture and captivity but also the physical postures of the figures, within both similar and disparate scenes, appearing on the French ivory as well as the German wooden caskets and in the Spanish cupolas.

Looking deeper into the caskets' composition, it is even more striking to note the remarkable consistency with which certain episodes were repeatedly presented together on a shared panel, suggesting that this was intentional and likely owing to some especially close thematic relationship between them.<sup>28</sup> One of the most prominent of such pairings is the episode of Enyas and the wild man with that of Galahad receiving the key to the *Château des Pucelles* (Castle of the Virgins).<sup>29</sup> Like the *LJ*'s miniature of fol. 12v, these images are rooted in popular tales and legends but the artists elected to tell not the longer narratives from which they derive, but rather only those portions which specifically relate to the moment of a lover's capture and liberation.

As with Lateral 2, certain characteristics of the Lateral 1 or chess cupola may permit a reading of the Moor as the overall winner since the largest figures within the dome appear in his prodigiously gory tilting tourney against the Christian knight.<sup>30</sup> However, a closer look at the totality of scenes based upon the code of chivalry inherent in both cupolas shows that another interpretation is also possible and in keeping with the suggestion that *coffrets composites* served as the models for the unusual presence of these figural paintings in the Alhambra. Looking at these scenes in terms of the culture of chivalry shows that in Lateral 1, as in the *LJ*'s fol. 12v, the Christian emerges as the victor over his Moorish rival in the game of love, in a way that involves both releasing a captive maiden and playing the lover's game of chess.

Bernis cautions us that

no debemos olvidar que siempre que los artistas góticos representan una historia desarrollada en varias escenas, cuando un mismo personaje toma parte en varias de ellas, aparece vestido exactamente igual en todas ellas. No conozco una sola excepción a esta regla.

[we should not forget that whenever Gothic artists represent a story developed through various scenes, when one individual takes part in several of them, he

<sup>28</sup> Rushing, "Adventure," 58 (see note 2).

<sup>29</sup> Rushing, "Adventure," 59–60 note 20 (see note 2) identifies four caskets with this particular combination and five more somewhat similar caskets. Cf. the right end panel of New York Metropolitan Museum of Art's K. 1284 (shown in the only figure in Loomis, "A Phantom Tale"; Hoopes, "An ivory casket," fig. 5 (see note 6); Rushing, "Adventure," fig. 2 (see note 2); Dodds, "The paintings," fig. 11 (see note 2), Cracow Cathedral's K. 1285 (José María de Azcarate, "El tema iconográfico del salvaje," *Archivo español de arte* 82 [1948]: 81–99; here pl. I, fig. 1); and the Lord Gort casket, showing the wild man scene combined with Gawain on the Perilous Bed in Ross, "Allegory and Romance," pl. 26, fig. c (see note 4).

<sup>30</sup> Dodds, "The paintings," 295 (see note 2).

appears dressed exactly the same in all of them. I am not familiar with a single exception to this rule.]<sup>31</sup>

However an example of precisely such confusion of disparate individuals occurs on the part of at least one casket carver. The left end panel of Lord Gort's casket shows two episodes from the same tale of Gawain, out of narrative order left-to-right, and separated by a scene from a Lancelot tale. However, the artist is patently reading Gawain and Lancelot as the same individual because "as in the other scenes, as he too bears on his shield the severed lion's paw which appears in the Perilous Bed episode."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, it is therefore entirely plausible that the Alhambra's similar-looking but not identically-dressed individuals, while not meant to represent different scenes with the same individuals as in a narrative, may indeed be meant to show generalized recognizable archetypes with whom viewers are meant identify in terms of shared appearance, nationality, religion, gender or status, e.g. Moor, Christian or damsel in distress. Thus, when scenes such as these are not narrative in nature but rather representative, the figures of each represented type may be argued to be interchangeable and therefore nearly as good as the same person or character. Such interchangeability also occurs between the three blonde maidens, two blond knights, two armored knights and two turbaned Moors of the seven scenes of Lateral 1.

In order to understand the shared meaning behind Lateral 1's non-narrative scenes, we must begin with an in-depth examination each of one in turn, starting with the chess scene which concerns this study. Each scene's relationship to the theme of love as capture is elucidated and, wherever possible, relationships are made to similar scenes on *coffrets composites* and in literature. The details of these scenes reveal coded symbology and multivalent readings of winners and losers, captors and captives, establishing not only a relationship to the caskets but also some insight into the rich significance of this European art contained within a Muslim castle.

Scene 1: the chess game. This cupola's chess game between a blond knight and a blonde maiden takes place before a European-style castle with crenellated towers. Seated on either side of an upright chessboard, the European players are accompanied by a decoratively-collared dog, or perhaps small lion, asleep

<sup>31</sup> Bernis, "Las pinturas," 30 (see note 2).

<sup>32</sup> Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 132 (see note 4), image in Ross pl. 27 fig. c, showing the lion's paw cut off as it touches his shield and then detached from its owner but remaining on the shield in both scenes to the right, both of Lancelot and Gawain. An image of a similar casket appears in Hoopes, "An ivory casket" (see note 6) fig. 4, showing the lion's attack similar to Lateral 1's Scene 2, with paw on shield but still attached to its owner, and then detached from lion but only on Gawain's shield in the Bed of Peril.

at the man's feet while the attendants of each player, shown in smaller proportion, observe from the towers behind them.

The chess scene marks the first appearance of a blonde maiden, or the first of three similar blonde maidens in Lateral 1 (Scenes 1, 5 and 6). These maidens are always dressed in predominantly white or light-colored clothing with red and gold details. The white may indicate virginity, as does Blancaflor's name, and the latter colors were and continue to be emblematic of Spain. Her long fingernails are painted red and she wears colorful stone jewelry and flowers in her hair, here as in Scenes 5 and 6.<sup>33</sup> Her opponent, the blond Christian knight, dressed also in the same Spanish colors—red and white with yellow details—sits with his sword lying suggestively between his crossed legs. He strongly resembles the knight in Scenes 2 and 7, also with blond hair and clothing of red with white about the neck.

Each player's hand gestures seem to indicate the play of the chess game despite the board's lack of pieces, with the man reaching onto the board, either to move a piece of his own or else to capture one of the maiden's, and her gesture of permission or perhaps surprise. This game is the allegorical hint which strongly suggests that the Christian wins over his Moorish competitor in Lateral 1, because once again he is shown to be the lover as well as a fighter whereas the Moor is shown to be only a fighter, at best, and at worst, a brutal killer. As the one inside the walled garden with the maiden, the European is revealed to be the clear winner in terms of chivalric love. The fixed nature of the Alhambra's chess painting, as opposed to the portable caskets, makes the work even more unusual because it shows a victory for the Spanish Christians on multiple levels. The blond European knights not only best their enemies at the art of love and get the girl, but they also accomplish this task using an amorous and intellectual game imported by the culture of their rivals, the first known masters of the game. Thus, the Christian here bests the Moor at courtly love, with his own game, in his own palace.

The very practical artistic technique of showing the board upright, which permits the observer to see the chessboard clearly from a bird's-eye view, is not limited to Spain or even those European countries with much Moorish contact, being found in numerous other early game images. While Bernis's research relates the Alhambra's chess scene to three other roughly contemporary works on the basis of the board's upright rather than profile presentation—the *LJ* (1283), the contemporary *Histora de los amores de Bayad y Riyad* (Biblioteca

<sup>33</sup> Many scholars including Florencio Janer ("*Los Libros de ajedrez, de los dados y de las tablas. Códice de la Biblioteca del Escorial, mandado escribir por D. Alfonso El Sabio. Estudio artístico-arqueológico,*" *Museo español de antigüedades* III [1874], 242 and 247) identify the ladies with red-painted fingernails and henna-dyed hands on *LJ* fols. 18r and 48r as Moorish women, however as argued in the second chapter of the author's dissertation, they are likely the very Christian Queen Violante and Alfonso's concubine Mayor Guillén de Guzmán.

Vaticana, Ar. 368) and a ceiling painting in the Chiaramonte palace of Palermo, Sicily dating from between 1377 and 1380—her observation is not strictly correct.<sup>34</sup> There even may exist evidence of an even earlier European precedent of a cupola painting with two figures on either side of an upright 7x7 unchecked chessboard in the mid-twelfth-century Cappella Palatina also of Palermo, Sicily, built by Norman King Roger II (1105–54).<sup>35</sup>

Although more primitive than the Alhambra's and the *Lj*'s artwork, the Capella Palatina chess painting shares scenic and thematic commonalities with those later works. Its two Arab players, of unclear gender, appear amid among other non-narrative secular scenes—including one with Aeneas as in Scene 6 of the Alhambra's Lateral 1—similar to those of the Alhambra. Naturalistic backgrounds of the Sicilian palace resemble the Andalusian cupolas as well as Alfonsine works containing identifiable species of animals.<sup>36</sup> It may even tell the story of another captive girl, the slave Riyad. The miniatures of the Bib. Vat. Ar. 368, which contains the love story of Bayad and Riyad and is contemporary

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<sup>34</sup> Bernis, "Las pinturas," 24, 28 and 31 (see note 2). More than a few upright game boards, some realistic and some less so, are seen in the manuscripts and other artisanry from interior Europe and the British Isles in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries before the Alhambra's cupola paintings. Upright chessboards include an 8x8 black-and-white checkered chess in the ca. 1230 German *Carmina Burana* (Cod. Lat. 4660, fol. 92r); two 4x4 possibly unchecked boards in the south choir clerestory stained-glass windows of the Le Mans Cathedral; three upright 8x8 red-and-white checkered chessboards in the ca. 1334 Austrian Willehelm Codex (fols. 22v, 24r and 25r); a 6x7 black-and-white checkered chessboard in the early fourteenth-century German Manesse manuscript (fol. 13r); a 7x5 all white board with what appear to be all uniform pieces (perhaps ferses, the ancestor of the chess queen, possibly indicating the game of checkers) arranged only on every other square as in modern checkers, but covering all such squares, in the early fourteenth-century *Romance of Alexander* (Fr. 790, fol. 125); and a 4x4 red-and-white checkered board, fourteenth-century Swiss casket (color image in Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 107 [see note 5]). An upright dicing board is also seen in the *Carmina Burana* (Cod. Lat. 4660, fol. 91r). Upright tables or backgammon boards include the 24-point tables board in the *Carmina Burana* (Cod. Lat. 4660, fol. 91v); two perhaps twelve-point boards in the stained glass of Le Mans Cathedral; the 24-point tables board in the Manesse manuscript (fol. 262v); and the 24-point red-and-black alternating lines in the fourteenth-century English Luttrell Psalter (fol. 76v). For more on the stained glass windows of Le Mans, see Meredith Parsons Lillich, "The Tric-Trac Window of Le Mans," *The Art Bulletin* 65.1 (March 1983): 23–33.

<sup>35</sup> Gianfelice Ferlito, "The First Painting of a Chess Game is in Sicily," *The Chess Collector* 3.3 (November 1993): 24–25. Again, I thank Gianfelice Ferlito for his kind help.

<sup>36</sup> Constable ("Chess and Courtly Culture," 332 note 88 [see note 2]) notes that Ana Domínguez Rodríguez ("El Libro de los juegos y la miniatura alfonsí," *Edilán* 2: 63) suggests that they are women. Domínguez Rodríguez's article appears in the second volume of: Alfonso X, el Sabio. *Libros del ajedrez, dados y tablas de Alfonso X. Ed. facsimil*. 2 vols. Madrid: Poniente; Valencia: García, 1987. See also Domínguez Rodríguez, Ana. "El Libro de los juegos y la miniatura alfonsí." *Edilán* 2: 30-121.

to Alfonso's *LJ*, have other similarities in terms of their illumination's contents including several doors and musical instruments.<sup>37</sup>

Chess players will appreciate that, unlike many chessboards figuring in medieval art and despite its lack of pieces, the Alhambra board is shown with the correct number of 64 squares (8x8) and checkered after the European and modern fashions in alternating colors. Fictional works which include a chess scene often show players at recognizable but inaccurate, irregularly-shaped—what might be called “fictionalized”—boards of varying dimensions, sometimes with squares of one uniform color after the Moorish fashion, either through the artist's ignorance regarding the game, lack of space or its lack of primacy in the tale. As with modern chess, the medieval game was rich in variants, including many differently sized boards including the *LJ* variants played on boards measuring 10x10 and 12x12.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Alfonso's book on games documents chess at a very precise moment in the history of the game's evolution in terms of the rules movement of its pawn and *fers*, which later evolved into the queen; that is, between the Ben Ezra's twelfth-century poem on the Arabic game of *shatranj* which lacked a double-step opening option for the pawn and the specification of the color of square for the *fers* in the early fourteenth-century Hebrew poem “The King's Delight.” However, artistic deviations from the usual board such as those noted previously neither conform to known variants nor do they express unique pieces or rules. Instead these representations, which often appear as isolated scenes within a larger narrative, tend to have fewer than 64 squares and uneven numbers of squares per side. With their either vacant, impossibly arranged or overpopulated boards, these images seem rather to indicate an imprecision more consistent with artistic license, or possibly indifference, that speaks to a desire to indicate the game of chess in general rather than a wish to impart its details or a faithful representation of some unique or local variation on the game, as this would be superfluous to its context as a love or other type of metaphor. For example, the German casket, discussed below with Scene 6, features a chessboard on which several indistinguishable pieces populate an inaccurate field of 6x7 squares. Perhaps the difference in accuracy between the Spanish artworks and those from other European regions may be that the former were created in an

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<sup>37</sup> For another, illustrated comparison of the *LJ* with *Bayad and Riyad*, see New York University's Hagop Kevorkian Center's in the Art Guide Index for the Virtual Classroom on Andalusia (<http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/program/neareast/andalusia/index.html>, last accessed March 15, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> For more on historical chess variants see R. G. Eales, *Chess: The History of a Game* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1985), John Gollon, *Chess Variations, Ancient, Regional, and Modern* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle, 1968), Harry Golombek, *Chess: A History* (New York: Putnam, 1976), Dennis Jesse McNab, H. J. R. Murray's *A History of Chess* (see note 3), Antonius van der Linde and Hans Bodlaender's *Chess Variant Pages* at <http://www.chessvariants.org> (last accessed March 15, 2011), and the author's dissertation (see note 11).

area in which more importance was assigned to the game and the average viewer was likely to notice, and be bothered by, any such irregularity. The degree of board detail seen in the Alhambra's correct number of squares, is therefore rare among medieval chess representations outside of works on the game or the Iberian Peninsula.

Scene 2: Knight vs. lion. Here a helmeted *caballero* wears his visor raised to reveal his face and is dressed nearly identically to the unhorsed knight of the joust (Scene 3, contiguous across the dome), in grey European-style armor under a long-sleeved red tunic with a long line of gold buttons at the sleeves.<sup>39</sup> This scene with a rampant lion appears diagonally across the dome from the sleeping lion held by in chain by the damsel of Scene 6. What is most notable about this figure is his posture, holding his sword aloft with both hands behind his head in preparation for a mighty chop at the lion mauling him. This simple vignette at once suggests two things: that the Alhambra's painters likely worked from some type of models and that those models may have been the French ivory *coffrets composites*.

First, since this distinctive posture is virtually a repetition of that of an unarmored and bare-headed man on the Christian side of Lateral 2, the strong similarity of their silhouettes suggests that the Alhambra's artist patterned his work on some type of model. Despite the fact that in Lateral 2 the lion is reversed so that the knight raises his sword at the animal's back rather than its front, the similar placement of the figure in both cupolas, that is behind a Christian hunter lancing a bear from his white horse, strongly reinforces this hypothesis.<sup>40</sup>

Second, the frequent repetition of what may be seen as an array of stock postures—such as standing with a weapon raised overhead with both arms or sitting with one leg casually crossed over the other—on caskets as well as in these paintings suggests that carvers, painters and other artists may have mutually influenced each other's work, perhaps via pattern-books from which clients could select the scenes they wished or from which engravers could work, cartoons or even using each other's works as models.<sup>41</sup> This would account for

<sup>39</sup> Similarly buttoned sleeves also appear in the miniatures of *LJ* fols. 16v, 48v and 68r.

<sup>40</sup> See the extreme left of Dodds, "The paintings," fig. 4 (see note 2).

<sup>41</sup> For more on theories of common models see Rushing, "Adventure," 58 note 17 (see note 2) and Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 133 (see note 4). Dodds also recognizes the Alhambra's raised-weapon posture from the caskets ("The paintings," 193 [see note 2]). Bernheimer notes the cross-legged position and reads it "to signify unconcern" (*Wild Men*, 124 [see note 6]). Other cross-legged sitters include the Alhambra's male chess player (easier to see in the perhaps retouched image in Mason, "The World of Chess," 62–63 (see note 16)), the wild man at the fountain with Yvain (Rushing fig. 1; who is not seated as per Rushing, "Adventure," 62 [see note 2]) and Tristan in the garden with Isolde (Hoopes, "An Ivory Casket," left side of fig. 6 [see note 6]).

the fact that seven of the eleven extant ivory back panels show this lion scene occupying the left side of the back panel and accompanied by other mainly sword-based scenes of Lancelot crossing the sword bridge, Gawain surviving the night on the Perilous Bed and ultimately liberating the maidens from the *Château Merveil*.<sup>42</sup> The earlier French caskets may well also have been models for the later German ones since on the same left end panel as the German casket's chess scene, there is a second wild man who strikes this pose with his club in a manner reminiscent of a modern baseball batter.

The sexually-charged message of this scene, that of a man with his weapon raised and ready for action, may ultimately derive from a similar one which appears frequently on the French ivory caskets, where the knight is usually identified as one of King Arthur's notably amorous knights of the Round Table. Hoopes and Rushing identify this knight as Gawain fighting the phantom lion which attacked him after his night in the Bed of Peril.<sup>43</sup> Dodds suggests that this is instead Lancelot and provides an interesting comparison from a French manuscript which illustrates the knight's fight with the lion as a continuation of the episode of the sword bridge.<sup>44</sup> In the French miniature, a man holds a lion in much the same way as the wild man's captive holding the lion. However, it should be noted that the lions in this latter tale vanish once the bridge is crossed and would therefore not require chopping.

Variations do exist between these ceiling scenes and those on the caskets but they tend to be slight, and rather than arguing against the use of artistic models, instead show sensitivity to the location. For example, on the caskets this figure with the raised arms faces right as befits his position at the far left of the long back panels, to draw the eye towards the action at its center. His change of orientation at the Alhambra may owe to a simple desire for variation, a differing model, such as in the German casket, or perhaps artistic sensitivity to the different space which he occupied, leading into the inward curve of the dome rather than the outer edge of a casket.

Scene 3: The bear hunt. The mounted figure of Scene 3, in which a blond knight kills a bear, also supports the theory of artistic modeling. Dressed in red with fluttering white cloak (cf. Scenes 1 and 7), the man stabs his sword through the heart of a bear.<sup>45</sup> Here and in Scene 6, the Christian knight appears

<sup>42</sup> Rushing, "Adventure," 58 (see note 2); image of K. 1282; V&A Museum, London, in Ross, "Allegory and Romance," pl. 27c (see note 4), and image of K. 1284; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (17.190.173), in Hoopes, "An Ivory Casket," fig. 4 (see note 6).

<sup>43</sup> Hoopes, "An Ivory Casket," 131–32 (see note 6) and Rushing, "Adventure," 58 (see note 2).

<sup>44</sup> Dodds, "The Paintings," 193 (see note 2), referring to New York, Morgan Library M. 806, fol. 160r (her fig. 13).

<sup>45</sup> Emphasizing the theme of courtly love, many people and animals in the Alhambra's domes are depicted receiving wounds to the symbolic region of the heart. This motif is, again, imitative of some caskets. Dodds, "The Paintings," fig. 12 (see note 2) shows a French ivory

on the white charger typically associated with the proverbial knight in shining armor, the *príncipe azul*, who rides to a maiden's rescue. Again supporting the case for artistic modeling, this mounted figure is nearly the mirror-image of the Christian knight of Lateral 2 who, wearing the same Spanish colors, also lances a bear in the mouth. Further, both bear-killing mounted Christians are backed by men in the overhead-chop position of Scene 2, suggesting that this pair of figures in both cupolas derives either from each other or from the same model which combined them.

Scene 4: The tournament. Here a turbaned horseman kills his European foe in a joust, is also likely modeled on the *coffrets composites*, since nearly every extant fourteenth-century casket lid presents a tournament. Dressed in orange-red and bearing an unusually-shaped and tasseled shield, the turbaned Moor rides his dark-brown horse in a joust where he lances his helmeted European foe through the heart, unhorsing that man from his light-brown mount.<sup>46</sup> This tilting Moor wears similar attire to the other Moor of this cupola (Scene 7), who appears hunting on a similarly colored horse, lengthwise across the dome's oval. However no other known casket shows either distinguishable competitors of unequal social condition or the exact moment of impact with an unhorsing, and thus no clear winner, making the Alhambra's tournament presentation unique both in that there is a distinct winner and in that winner being the Moor. The loser is distinguished from the blond Christian knight by his light brown, not white, horse as well as his armor (cf. Scenes 2 and 3).

Dodds believes that the importance of the message of these figures is indicated by their relative size, being the largest figures shown in Lateral 1. She reads that message as "clear statements of Arab power over Christians" suggesting neatly how the different perspective of an insecure Muslim ruler such as she describes Muhammad V to be might also view them.<sup>47</sup> Such a victory is most likely a concession to the Moorish patron but it is not the only, nor perhaps the greatest victory in Lateral 1. While it is true that the Moor here bests a European opponent at his own European style of duel and also skillfully hunts a deer in Scene 7, these kills may be red herrings that show the Moor as masterful and virile. It is nevertheless the scenes in which the Moor is conspicuous by his absence which show him to be unvictorious in courtly love. This is most true of the chess game in Scene 1 because of its allusion to intimate contact with the maiden as a sweeter victory.

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casket where a knight, on foot, stabs the wild man through the heart with his sword; the maiden appears to be absent (K. 1298 per Rushing, "Adventure," 60 [see note 2]). Other caskets such as K. 1284 show the wild man lanced through the mouth.

<sup>46</sup> See Dodds, "The Paintings," fig. 15 (see note 2); Smith, *Spain*, 101-03 (see note 20).

<sup>47</sup> Dodds, "The Paintings," 197 (see note 2). The dying Christian "[spills] prodigious gore and his face wears a pathetic and anguished expression" in a "monumental inversion of ... Santiago Matamoros" (Dodds, "The Paintings," 195 [see note 2]).



Scene 5: Damsel in captivity. Widely separated from the tournament of Scene 4, this scene relates directly to it and has much in common with the *LJ*'s fol. 12v.<sup>48</sup> A maiden with long and flowing blonde hair appears along with the smaller figure of her attendant in the uppermost portions of a Moorish castle with exotic minarets (cf. the European castle of Scene 1), to observe the clash of cultures in Scene 4 from a tower. This maiden, like that of Scenes 1 and 6, also wears white and is bedecked with long earrings and a wreath of red and blue flowers in her hair. Much as Blancaflor in the *LJ*, her towers affords her a good vantage point from which to view the contest upon which her fate may depend. While her doorway is not blocked, it opens onto the hazards of the battlefield. As for her gesture, it is not clear whether is she clapping or otherwise approving of the outcome below, or if she is offering up prayers for her doomed hero, among other possibilities.

Scene 6: Knight rescues damsel in distress. Densely packed into this scene is a series of four interrelated captures of its figures—from left to right: a blond knight, a wild man, a lady and a controversial lion.<sup>49</sup> Loomis identifies this maiden's abduction as an episode from the tale *Enyas* and the hairy wild man of the woods (also wodehouse or woodwose) on the basis of its similarities with a tale found in the marginalia of two early fourteenth-century manuscripts and many contemporary caskets.<sup>50</sup> The Alhambra's version shows a wodehouse as he grasps the wrists of an unchaperoned blonde maiden holding a

<sup>48</sup> Image in Smith, *Spain*, 101–02 (see note 20) and Azcarate, "El tema," pl. III, fig. 1 (see note 29).

<sup>49</sup> Image in Smith, *Spain*, 100–01 (see note 20).

<sup>50</sup> The scene of the wild man in Lateral 1 is specifically addressed by Loomis, "A Phantom Tale," 752, 754 (see note 2); Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 130 note 4 (see note 4); and appears in Husband, *The Wild Man*, fig. 36 (see note 7); Azcarate, "El tema," Lám. III, fig. 1 (see note 29); Dodds, "The Paintings," fig. 2 (see note 2). Loomis ("A Phantom Tale," 176 [see note 2]) relates the bas-de-page marginalia scenes from two early fourteenth-century English manuscripts with the wild man's abduction of the maiden seen on many extant fourteenth-century caskets and other articles, citing the *Taymouth Hours* (British Library, Yates Thompson MS. 57, fols. 61v–67v) and the *Smithfield Decretals* (British Library, Royal MS. 10.E.IV, fols. 69v, 72r, 72v, 73r, 74r, 74v and 101r–106v). On the bottom margin of fol. 72[r] a young woman clings to a tree to resist abduction by a hairy wodehouse who grasps her by the waist. On fol. 101v, the woman's knights in shining medieval armor have arrived and killed her attacker. *Enyas*, his long sword now sheathed, leads her away to safety by the wrist. The body of the beheaded wodehouse lies behind a tree and is guarded by an unhappy dog. Loomis gives the Anglo-Norman text of the *Taymouth* inscriptions ("A Phantom Tale," 752–53 [see note 2]); these are summarized so many times in English that there is no need to repeat them here: see Hoopes, "An Ivory Casket," 131 (see note 6); Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 129 (see note 4); Rushing, "Adventure," 60 (see note 2); and Jordi Sánchez-Martí, "'A Fowler Man Ther May Non Be': The Wild Man in Ipomadon A," *English Studies* 87. 6 [December 2006]: 644–52; here 648). Azcarate offers a summary in Spanish ("El tema," 82–83 [see note 29]). Loomis explains that *Enyas* may refer to the Trojan War hero Aeneas or possibly Helyas, Knight of the Swan ("A Phantom Tale," 751 [see note 2]), the latter perhaps related to the *Caballero del Cisne* known in Spain via Alfonso X's chronicle of the *Gran Conquista de Ultramar*.

sleeping lion by a heavy metal chain, while at the same time the wodehouse turns his head to look at the blond knight who lances him through the heart.

This blond knight rides a white horse and is dressed in Spanish colors like the other bare-headed European men in both cupolas, though here he also wears grey armor beneath his white short-sleeved tunic and he bears a shield decorated with three birds. His avian heraldry may be related to the bird held by the maiden in Lateral 2.

The woodwose's grip on the maiden is very similar to those in the *Smithfield Decretals* though in the caskets there is greater variety in the relative positions of the three people. Compared with some other images of hirsute but still threateningly naked wild men, the Alhambra's wild man is rather modestly clad in *pannos* like many of the *LJ*'s down-on-their-luck gamblers (fols. 65r, 65v, 67r and 68v). It is important to note that, while these paintings are very European in style and content, the hairy wild man, especially as an abductor of women, is not exclusive to European folklore. This legend of cryptozoology, similar in appearance to the North American Bigfoot or Sasquatch, may derive from classical mythology's satyrs and fauns, the folklore of pre-Christian Gaul or perhaps even other more Eastern traditions, where it is also known. Eastern hairy wild men include the Tibetan Yeti and other beasts also known by various names in Arabic-speaking countries including the Bar-Manu of Afghanistan.<sup>51</sup> It is also important to note that the monster chosen is not a dragon, which might eat the maiden, but instead one man-like enough to represent a sexual threat.

The wodehouse is also a multivalent symbol, whose possible interpretations range from everyman to the baser, lustful side of man's passions and any enemy considered alien and other, that is a bogeyman who could represent any of the many invaders of the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>52</sup> Significantly, Timothy Husband explains that the wodehouse and the Moor were at times equated because both were believed to be black and therefore evil.<sup>53</sup> This corresponds

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<sup>51</sup> See Michael Newton's *Encyclopedia of Cryptozoology: A Global Guide to Hidden Animals and Their Pursuers* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland and Company, 2005).

<sup>52</sup> "[T]here is ample testimony for the wild man's proclivity to carry away bundles of feminine innocence" (Bernheimer, *Wild Men*, 125 [see note 6]; Figs. 25, 26, 28 show abduction by wild men) which could be argued as their "purportedly insatiable appetite for women" (Bernheimer, *Wild Men*, 125 [see note 6]). However, Sánchez-Martí emphasizes that the woodwose is looking for a wife and not instant sexual gratification ("A Fowler Man," 646 [see note 50], citing Bernheimer, *Wild Men*, 125–26 [see note 6]). This motive matches that of most tales of captive maidens who were promised to someone else, such as Blancaflor and Aeneas's wife Lavinia. Another more modern example from the world of video games is the blonde princess that the player of the early video game *Donkey Kong* (Nintendo, 1981) liberates from her hairy hominid captor.

<sup>53</sup> Husband, *The Wild Man*, 79 [see note 7], citing Hartmann von Aue. This curious comparison is supported by several period artworks including the Castle-Siege tapestries; plates showing

to the Moor riding the darkest mount in both Alhambra cupolas. Given the ambivalent message in Lateral 2 where either man could be considered the winner, the Christian knight's victory over the lusty woodwose looks to be a coded message in which the artist implies that the Christians ultimately are superior because they win the ladies while the Moors only win in bellic terms, as represented by the gruesome joust where a similar heart-lancing occurs. Given that the Christian knight battles both Moor and beast-man, parallels can be drawn between his two enemies as inferior beings and thereby also presage the lovers' chess game between the European knight and his lady.

This blonde maiden wears virginal white as well as jewelry and flowers in her hair (cf. Scenes 1 and 5). Rather than earrings, her colorful stone necklace recalls that seen on *LJ* fol. 18r as do her long red-painted fingernails. Far from looking fearful or even concerned, she casually holds the chain to a sleeping lion which has been a lightning rod for controversy beginning with Loomis who felt the scene had no place here in the story, because he mistakes these scenes for a narrative, and therefore that the animal's presence was indicative of the painter's ignorance of the tale of Enyas.<sup>54</sup> However, this particular lion is no real surprise, given the general abundance of lion imagery in the Alhambra (totaling fifteen with the patio's fountain, the one killed in Lateral 2's hunt by a Christian and Lateral 1's Scenes 1 and 2), in the probable caskets models for these cupolas and moreover in regional political symbols. Rushing cites the presence of lions in the adventures of Gawain and Lancelot on caskets as a partial explanation, referencing the panel where a dead lion can be seen beneath the horse of the hero stabbing the wild man.<sup>55</sup> Lions are commonplace political symbols of medieval Iberia, from the Nasrid rulers who used the lion as their symbol to the Spanish kingdom of Castile, which by this point in history had incorporated neighboring León [*Lion* in English] and temporarily ruled over the French city of Lyons as well. Indeed in all images of interest to this paper, castles as well as lions are recurring allusions to political heraldry.

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wild men as hunters; and drawings, engravings, tapestries and manuscript illuminations which show wild men combating armored knights as well as jousting; and caskets which show knights both winning and losing maidens in competition with wild men. See Husband, *The Wild Man*, sections 14, 16 and 34–36 [see note 7], as well as Rebecca Martin, "Wild Men and Moors in the Castle of Love: The Castle-Siege Tapestries in Nuremberg, Vienna, and Boston" (Ph.D. diss., University of NC at Chapel Hill, 1983; Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1984). Her dissertation addresses the same tapestries as Husband, *The Wild Man*, sec. 14.

<sup>54</sup> Loomis, "A Phantom Tale," 752 (see note 2). He believes instead that the Alhambra's combination of the Enyas motif with that of the lady with the pet lion results from items such as the *hanap* (goblet) quoted from the 1364–1365 personal inventory of Louis, Duke of Anjou and Regent of France, which shows a wild man riding a lion (752, 754).

<sup>55</sup> This scene appears on the left end of the Lord Gort casket, image in Ross, "Allegory and Romance" pl. 26 fig. c (see note 4).

What is most intriguing about this particular lion is his presentation as doubly harmless, being both chained and asleep, and what this might mean in terms of his interpretation or that of the lady who so laxly holds dominion over him. Azcarate unconvincingly attempts to link the presence of the lion to the Spanish chivalric novel *Palmerín de Inglaterra*. While heroes from classical Alexander to Spain's Cid and Don Quijote fight lions to demonstrate their strength, the manner in which the Alhambra's lady holds the lion's chain makes it patently not the case that "el salvaje ... para asegurarla, la encadena a su fiel seguidor" ["the savage ... in order to secure her, chains her to his faithful follower"].<sup>56</sup> That the animal is a captive and sleeping may be a reference to the very land the Alhambra occupies as the last Moorish holdout about to be lost and returned to European control. Not only is the painting to be found in that city, it is also found in the Moorish palace belonging to the last holdout of the Reconquest.

Literary connections for this captive lover motif are found in the romance poem "Abenámar," the Christian Spanish King don Juan speaks to the city of Granada as though she were a beautiful woman and proposes marriage to her. But she, the personified city, rejects him by loyally declaring her current marriage to the Muslim Caliph of Granada, the eponymous Abenámar, who just happens also to be the son of a Moorish father and a captive Christian mother. Perhaps the Alhambra's captive lady with her pet lion represents the originally-Spanish city of Granada or the palace of the Alhambra, which the knight representing Spain intends to wrest back from the control of the Moorish invaders, represented by the woodwose. Her lion might be docile with her because she does not represent the enemy or else he might be sleeping as an indication that he is about to awaken and rebel against her. Further, if the Alhambra's artist knew that the casket scenes of a wodehouse's abduction were thwarted by someone called Enyas, a parallel between that knight and Aeneas may have been intentional. Aeneas, son of Aphrodite as well as Trojan War hero, was both a lover *and* a fighter: Carthaginian Queen Dido's unrequited love for him drove her to suicide (a tale that is intercalated in Alfonso X's *Estoria de España*) and Aeneas fought in a battle of besieged territory over a woman that is reminiscent of the Reconquest of city of Granada. The loss of Spain's territory to the Moors is of course also legendarily blamed on a woman, Florinda la Cava. Aeneas's wife Lavinia was promised to the ruler of another land, the king of Rutuli, but fell in love at first sight with Aeneas from her tower, as in Lateral 1's Scene 5 and as Blancaflor is portrayed in the *LJ*.<sup>57</sup> The power of these symbols to evoke tales of romance here takes precedence over their absolute link to any particular narrative.

<sup>56</sup> Azcarate, "El tema," 86 (see note 29).

<sup>57</sup> In Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneide*, ca. 1215, see Camille, *The Medieval Art*, 34 (see note 5).

Two German wooden caskets, identified by Bernheimer as being from the same workshop, do not show mixed themes, but rather narrate two opposite outcomes of a woodwose abduction scenario in their four panels. Bernheimer explains how inverting the expected denouement on the casket also changes the message that the bridegroom sends to his bride with the gift of such a box. When the knight is victorious over the wild man in winning the lady's hand, "[t]he young citizen of the Rhineland who sent this casket to his ladylove intended to further his ends by protesting figuratively that his intentions were respectable."<sup>58</sup> In contrast, when the reverse occurs and the wild man wins the lady's hand, this second "young man ... intended to manifest his sensual desire, while protesting that, once granted his request, he would be a submissive and courteous lover."<sup>59</sup> The left side panel of this second casket most strikingly corresponds with the Alhambra's chess scene, in that it repeats both the theme of chess a game of lovers as well as the posture of the figure to their left, similar to the knight in Lateral 1's second scene.<sup>60</sup>

While ambient setting differs, the positions of the man and the woman are reversed, and in the Alhambra the players are seated in the Moorish fashion upon cushions on the floor, the nearly identical postural elements of the grouping reinforces the suggestion of a common model made above. Additional evidence of a model is seen in the parallels between the chess scene on the German casket and the scene of Tristan and Isolde in Hoopes fig. 6. While again the genders are reversed, their gestures remain identical, making it seem as though the maiden is making the chess capture which corresponds nicely to Bernheimer's interpretation of the scene as representative of her having tamed the woodwose by her love (124–25). Further details of setting and props support the comparison, as the scene is set likewise among trees on both caskets and both women hold their lapdogs and the cross-legged men hold their birds.

<sup>58</sup> Bernheimer, *Wild Men*, 124 (see note 6). His fig. 31 identifies the Rhenish fourteenth-century casket as belonging to Hamburg's Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe. This casket also appears in Husband, *The Wild Man*, fig. 47, where it is identified as 1877.380 of that same museum.

<sup>59</sup> Bernheimer, *Wild Men*, 124 (see note 7). His fig. 32 identifies this second Rhenish fourteenth-century casket as part of the collection of Cologne's Kunstgewerbe Museum and he discusses the erotic implications of these two caskets (123–26). This casket also appears in Husband, *The Wild Man*, figs. 48 and 49, who identifies it as no. 16 of the same museum (see note 4). The right end panel of this same casket contains a proffered ring scene similar to the LJ's fol. 40r (color image in Camille, *The Medieval Art*, 67 [see note 5]). The tamed falcon on his gloved right wrist compares to the LJ's hawking fols. 8r and 30. The theme of a game between lovers where the knight holds a hawk is repeated on one end of a painted wood casket made in Konstanz ca. 1320 (now held in Zurich's Schweizerisches Landesmuseum) and on the Louvre's carved ivory mirror back mentioned in note 4. Camille shows one of the box's rose-shaped brass studs forms clasps over the board itself, the metaphorical rose of romance making "clear what are the stakes of this game" (*The Medieval Art*, 107, 109 [see note 5]).

<sup>60</sup> Bernheimer, *Wild Men*, fig. 32[d] (see note 6).

Scene 7: The deerslayer. Presented here is another hunting scene which has much in common with those presented in Lateral 2 in that its hunter, a turbaned Arab on horseback spears a hart through the heart.<sup>61</sup> It also is reminiscent of the legend of the unicorn, another sexually-charged capture in terms of a maiden's love where the animal's death represents *la petite morte* of sexual consummation. Some of the most best known images of late medieval art to survive are the elaborate unicorn tapestries now held at the Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In arguably the most famous of these, a unicorn is unconvincingly chained to a tree—much as the Alhambra's maiden is not really restraining her lion—and encircled by a remarkably low and therefore ineffective fence. Along with other plant symbols, these flimsy restraints are interpreted as symbolic of willing captivity in a happy and fruitful marriage.

Just as Camille notes the exaggeratedly long lances on the Bargello's chessboard and Rushing notes the "rather obvious erotic overtones" of unicorn's horn in maiden's lap, there is a superabundance of phallic imagery of weapons of the Alhambra's cupolas.<sup>62</sup> All told there are twenty-seven pointed weapons between the three domes: ten in the central, seven in Lateral 1 and ten in Lateral 2. Similarly obvious imagery is seen in the high number of phallic weapons on the casket sides which combine Gawain's fight with lion, Lancelot crossing the sword bridge and weapons raining down on Gawain's bed of peril. Of the two images of panels showing this grouping each contains a frenzy of at least sixteen swords. The sexual message is also clear, for after the gallant knights successfully execute these tests of their mighty weapons, the men either "release" the virgins from their "captivity," as Galahad and Gawain do, or they sleep with their married beloved, as dictated by *fin'amour* and as did Lancelot. Each liminal moment of capture befits these items as love tokens given upon crossing the threshold into a new civil status, no matter the didactic nature of their origin or source tales.

## Check and Mate

Despite valuable insights from Loomis, Bernis and others relating the caskets to the Alhambra, all prior research fails to decipher the chivalric message contained in their underlying and unifying theme of amorous capture. This perhaps may owe to seeking either one single textual source to unify all their elements or else, in those cases where the literary sources of an episode are

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<sup>61</sup> Hoopes, "An Ivory Casket," fig. 6 (see note 6). See also note 46.

<sup>62</sup> Camille, *The Medieval Art*, 62 (see note 5).

known, too extensive a connection with the entire narratives from which any of these capture scenes derives. However what we are dealing with in Lateral 1 is not narration as is seen in Lateral 2, that is, a series of connected episodes which narrate a story in chronological order. Rather Lateral 1, like its probable *coffrets composites* models, consists of a collection of scenes meant only to be representative or evocative of one particular theme or recognizable variations on it. Simply because the scenes derive from longer, known or unknown stories does not require that any one recognizable episode of a tale represent the moral of that tale as a whole. José Gudiol Ricart is correct when he laments, “no text could possibly explain such an iconography.”<sup>63</sup> We must instead consider why the same non-narrative groupings of selected scenes appear together in the Alhambra and in other places in order to decipher their collective message.

Dodds was the first to suggest that the majority of Lateral 1's scenes were copied from small caskets such as K. 1281 and K. 1284, and that possibly either that the artists had a pair of ivory caskets at their disposal or else a lost prototype with that particular combination of scenes.<sup>64</sup> Given the vogue of these caskets at the time the Alhambra's cupolas were painted, it is not difficult to imagine that the Moorish ruler was aware of such articles and perhaps even had seen or owned one or more from which the paintings could have been modeled.<sup>65</sup> Indeed it is an easy conceptual leap to envision the exterior carvings on four sides of a casket—two short and two long—transferred to interior paintings on the elliptical shape of the Alhambra's cupolas and indeed “[t]he impression is one of a decorated casket turned inside out.”<sup>66</sup> However, the reasons Dodds offers do not address why these specific scenes—including captive maidens and chess—would have been combined in this way here and on the caskets, only that the Nasrid ruler who commissioned these paintings “might have wished to create a fashionable ambiance, one based on imported taste, and inspired by the wealth and power of the encroaching Christian empires of Europe.”<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> José Gudiol Ricart, *Pintura gótica*. *Ars Hispaniae IX* (Madrid: N.p., 1955), 48, quoted in Dodds, “The Paintings,” 191 (see note 2).

<sup>64</sup> Dodds identifies in Alhambra scenes of Tristan and Isolde in the garden (see also note 21), the Fountain of Love, the wodehouse, the lion on the chain, the chess game and Lancelot with the lion (“The Paintings,” 194 [see note 2]), “punctuated by hunting figures” (“The Paintings,” 191 [see note 2]). Dodds's (“The Paintings,” 193 [see note 2]) and Constable's identification of the chess game in the Alhambra painting as the one between Tristan and Isolde, perhaps because some caskets show these two lovers in a garden and since “[t]he Tristan legend was also known in Muslim Spain” (Constable, “Chess and Courtly Culture,” 325 and note 74 [see note 2]), is problematic given that these individuals are clearly not aboard a ship as described in the story. Other artistic representations of this scene aboard a ship, with the fateful love potion, include that from a fourteenth-century French manuscript shown by Schafroth, *The Art of Chess*, 58 (see note 5).

<sup>65</sup> Dodds concurs (“The Paintings,” 194 [see note 2]).

<sup>66</sup> Dodds, “The Paintings,” 194 (see note 2).

<sup>67</sup> Dodds, “The Paintings,” 195 (see note 2).

Other reasons offered for the Alhambra's non-narrative chess cupola do not seem to fit the thematic unity either of caskets or of Lateral 1, especially in light of the symbolic nature of the gifts as containers and their relationship to the sexually-suggestive game of chess. The earliest suggested explanation, that of artistic indifference or incompetence, is too facile to hold up to much scrutiny.<sup>68</sup> Just because the message of a piece eludes us, in no way supports that the casket or Alhambra artists had no clue as to what they were doing. Art can very well be non-narrative without being nonsensical or meaningless. It simply does not follow that a specific pattern of scenes would catch the popular fancy to such a degree, leaving so many extant caskets and inspiring paintings in a foreign land, if they were perceived by their target audience as the disjointed or misinterpreted work of hacks. Medieval patrons, accustomed to seeking the invisible message behind each and every visible symbol, would not have repeatedly invested in the commission of such expensive gifts for an occasion so rife with symbolic meaning as marriage if the items did not speak to the purpose of the gift and the spirit in which the gift was given.

Indeed this deliberate choice of scene must be what drives what Rushing calls the essentially universal assumption that these caskets are betrothal or marriage gifts, in which noble ladies might safeguard love tokens (such as betrothal or wedding rings then in vogue or chessmen used to play with their suitors) and not, as he humorously notes, for priests to store communion wafers.<sup>69</sup> If the medium is the message and these items are in the main containers, then such a theme of happy capture and a promise of more to come befits jewelry boxes as well as marriage. A box, particularly a jewelry box, is such a lovely gift because it hints at future gifts to be put inside it. This suggestive signal would not have been lost on a medieval mind, given the frequent placement of such images on lavish receptacles meant to capture and contain a lover's presents, or as in period tales, often to contain the lover's literal heart.<sup>70</sup> Conversely, if the choice of scenes were not intentionally or

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<sup>68</sup> Loomis criticizes what he calls the ignorance of the Alhambra painter ("A Phantom Tale," 178 [see note 2]). Hoopes concludes that some carvers "[knew or cared] little for the legends which the carvings illustrate" ("An Ivory Casket," 139 [see note 6]) and harshly derides one as a "forger who copied quite blindly what he found available" ("An Ivory Casket," 139 [see note 6]). Dodds also felt that these artists jumbled together "chivalric scenes without being obliged to understand their real meaning" ("The Paintings," 195 [see note 2]), although she acknowledges that she does not know what that meaning might be. However, she rightly concludes that "however misunderstood ... [the presence of these Christian legends] cannot be accidental" ("The Paintings," 195 [see note 2]).

<sup>69</sup> Rushing, "Adventure," 64, 64 note 39, and 62 (see note 2).

<sup>70</sup> Heart caskets appear in *Das Herzmaere* (*Tale of the Heart*) by Konrad von Würzburg ca. 1257 (where the lover, who dies from grief at the separation from his married love, ordered his removed heart sent to her in a richly jeweled case along with the ring she gave him), the late thirteenth-century *Le Roman du Châtelain de Couci et de la dame de Fayel* (where a similar lover



significantly related to marital love, then we should expect to see caskets and the Alhambra's cupolas displaying unrelated images without an underlying theme, from just any source and/or to be much more like the predominant art of the late medieval period. Much of this art is either religious or political in nature, yet we are not dealing with caskets showing episodes of the life of Jesus, or the joys or miracles of the Virgin Mary, or portraits of kings, or maps, or battles (obviously, those not involving women), or the names and/or portraits of members of the two families to be joined by the union, or combinations of these. Instead what we consistently find are capture scenes from chivalric love stories similar to the tale of Flores and Blancaflor.

Therefore in order to answer the question "What messages do the Alhambra paintings send?" it is reasonable to examine the answers to the same question about their likely casket models.<sup>71</sup> Rushing believes the general intended message of the caskets was meant to contain playful sexual connotations of "I will master the [perilous] bed for you, I will let you ride me."<sup>72</sup> The gift of the pyxis, or lidded box, also says, "you have captured my heart and me, beloved, here it is and/or here is something in which to keep it, more gifts are to follow" and gives fair warning to the lover's intended that she and her virginity are to be captured next, a sexual *quid pro quo* within the socially-acceptable confines of marriage, much in keeping with message of the tapestry's happily enchained unicorn and the topos of slaves of love or *Minnesklaven*.<sup>73</sup> For all these reasons it is puzzling that so far no one has suggested that the Alhambra's lateral cupolas might have been a gift to a woman, similar to the caskets on which they were likely modeled. It especially would explain the unexpected European style of the Alhambra paintings if they were a lover's gift from a Moorish ruler to a Christian woman. Although the caliph's message may have differed somewhat owing to his cultural perspective, and even more so if the woman in question were his captive, he might have made allowances for her European tastes while also

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sends his heart along with the braids she left him as a love token; both missives are intercepted by the ladies' husbands and recognized for what they are, served to the wives as their final meals), the lai *Läüstic* (where the nightingale, used as the wife's excuse to rendezvous with her lover and slain by the jealous husband, is delivered to her lover in a jeweled gold casket), the first tale of the fourth day Boccaccio's *Il Decamerone* (in which father serves his daughter's second husband's heart to her in a gold cup), and the fairy tale Snow White (wherein the evil step-mother orders a huntsman to kill her and return with the proof of her heart in a small casket). Art and real life imitated each other in the cases of Alfonso X (d. 1284) and Robert the Bruce (d. 1329); Alfonso's will specified that his heart be buried separately from his body, the former in Murcia and the latter in Seville with his parents, and the Bruce attempted to have his heart buried in the Holy Land but it was found in its casket under the floor of Melrose Abbey in 1996.

<sup>71</sup> Dodds, "The Paintings," 195 (see note 2).

<sup>72</sup> Rushing, "Adventure," 64 (see note 2).

<sup>73</sup> Rushing, "Adventure," 62, 65 (see note 2).

employing an artist who assured his patron that he would modify traditional scenes so that the non-Europeans like himself were shown, in their own eyes at least, as equal or superior.

Rushing's suggestion that these scenes all show deeds of knightly derring-do "in the service of ladies and love" touches upon these cultural aspects, and is true but a little broad, while Ross and Antoniewicz's contrasting of chaste love versus lustful love while appealing in a medieval Spanish literary context is too religious.<sup>74</sup> Ross addresses the symbolic meaning citing but ultimately dismissing the ideas of Antoniewicz who "proposed an interpretation of some of its subjects [the Cracow casket] which supposes a deliberate symbolic intention on the part of the designer of the casket" noting "an intentional contrasting of purity and lust in several of the subjects depicted" including guilty Lancelot and pure Gawain, the satyr-like woodwose and pure Galahad, old Aristotle and the youths at the fountain. This suggestion is particularly appealing in a Spanish context because it is the same theme used in Juan Ruiz's *Libro de buen amor* contrasting good love, that is the chaste love of God, with *loco amor* [crazy, lustful love of the flesh]. Instead, however, what is comparable is the manner in which these men liberate captive women, and in the case of the tales of Aristotle and Tristan, that both address the follies of love which involve capture by trickery. Ultimately, the key to interpreting these symbols lies in the Alhambra's symbolic chess game which forges the love-as-capture/captivity connection. Although its chessboard lacks pieces, the young lover still reaches out a hand as though to capture a piece. In the episodes of Gawain/Lancelot fighting the lion on Lord Gort's casket, to which the Alhambra's scenes seem so closely related, what part of the lion does he capture? He captures the paw which he retains as an emblem upon his shield, as in a lady's hand in marriage. It is indeed the paw of his prey that the Christian holds in Alhambra's Lateral 2.<sup>75</sup> Whether it is literally hunting and capturing a fierce beast of prey, symbolic of power and passion, such as a lion, bear or boar (Lateral 1 and 2); or defeating a foe in his own style of tournament (Lateral 1); or ensnaring through trickery a symbolic beast of purity, as with the unicorn, or an unfaithful wife, as with Isolde (both red-handed captures *in flagrante delicto* as with Aristotle above); or the glory and rewards of victory in the tournament, dominion over a foolishly unequal lover; or the theme of one or more captive

<sup>74</sup> Rushing, "Adventure," 61 (see note 2) and Ross, "Allegory and Romance," 139 (see note 4), citing Johann vonn Antoniewicz, "Ikonographisches zu [Chrestien] de Troyes," (*Vollmöller's Romanische Forschungen* [Erlangen, 1890], V: 241–68 (Ross cites 252[–68] in "Allegory and Romance" [see note 4]).

<sup>75</sup> Note also the similar position of the maiden's supplicating hand of the shield of Enyas in Loomis, "A Phantom Tale," Rushing, "Adventure," fig. 2 and Dodds, "The Paintings," fig. 11 (see note 2 for all three references).

virgins held against their will by a wild man or in a magic castle; or pieces in a chess game—these images all portray love as capture.

It is also doubtful that the Alhambra's abduction by wild man was meant merely to be a cautionary tale castigating the female vice of ingratitude.<sup>76</sup> While Dodds presents a case for such a didactic purpose, others, including Rushing, argue strongly that the "oral-literate-visual *Mischkultur* of the Middle Ages is much more complex than that," that such symbols are often wonderfully multivalent and that the tale from the Taymouth marginalia may not "support the weight of [such a] theory" because "the origins of stories, motives, and characters tend to disappear, to become irrelevant, even when they can be traced, as literary materials are broken apart, reconsidered, and adapted into new contexts and new media."<sup>77</sup> Indeed, the meaning behind the individual episode, and not the whole story, seems to be what is important here as we only see the rescue, not any ingratitude.<sup>78</sup> In the scenes from both the caskets and the Alhambra, as in the *LJ*'s illumination, we have rescue scenes which all repeat this same concept love as capture. The fact that these scenes appear divorced from their larger narrative and gathered together in patterns in the Alhambra, similar to those observed on European caskets, is the very distinction between narrative and representative art, necessary to deciphering the message behind such images.<sup>79</sup> The overall tone of the images chosen indeed ably sends a coherent, cohesive and amorous message even without a narrative just as fragments of *romances* hold their own unique and independent place within oral tradition of Spanish literature, with or without a connection to the longer epic tales from which they may have sprung. These highlights of the popular tales of the period all speak to the purpose of the containers, and even embracing alcoves, on which they appear.

Masterfully reinforcing this theme of capture is the grouping of images on the ivory caskets befits an object that was intended to please a maiden and this grouping is therefore unlikely to have been misused, as Dodds offers.<sup>80</sup> This is particularly true with reference to the Alhambra's chess scene and the *LJ*'s chess-rescue miniature. Galahad's episode at the castle, Enyas's attack on the woodwose, the Alhambra's chess scene and the *LJ*'s fol. 12v all involve heroes liberating of women from their captors and thus earning their "gratitude" according to laws of chivalry. Much in the same way that chess can be said to be an oedipalistic ritual slaying of the father figure, this rescuing of distressed damsels is symbolic of releasing them from patriarchal captivity of their own

<sup>76</sup> As argued by Loomis, "A Phantom Tale," 178–79 (see note 2); also Bernheimer, *Wild Men*, 122–23 (see note 6) and Sánchez-Martí, "A Fowler Man," 649 (see note 50).

<sup>77</sup> Rushing, "Adventure," 56, 62 and 60 (see note 2).

<sup>78</sup> Rushing, "Adventure," 61 (see note 2).

<sup>79</sup> See Rushing, "Adventure," 56 (see note 2).

<sup>80</sup> See Dodds, "The Paintings," 193 (see note 2).

virgin state into the new captivity of matrimony.<sup>81</sup> In the Alhambra's sixth scene with the wild man as in marriage, there is a chain reaction in which each capture triggers yet another capture: the maiden tames the lion only to have the wodehouse try the same with her; the wodehouse nabs the maiden only to be slain by the knight; the knight frees the maiden only to capture her and be captured by her himself.

So why do two of Spain's first chess paintings, separated by nearly a century and appearing in completely different contexts, share such similarly accurate, upright and checkered boards, in such similar cultural and symbolic presentations involving the chivalric lover's battle for conquest of his lady after securing her liberation from Muslim captivity? Because the damsel in distress is a socio-political metaphor. Both images show the chess game employed not as a representation of the different ranks of feudal society, as in Cessolis's *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium* but rather more narrowly as an allegory of European courtly love and sexual conquest typical of the Middle Ages appropriate to a context of love rather than one of war or death. Reflecting the multicultural reality of medieval Spain, both these Spanish artworks show competitive interplay between Muslim and Christian cultures, mirroring the political reality of Spain's Reconquest. Chess as a battle game, based on early Indian military structure and recast to reflect medieval Europe's feudal hierarchy, is a particularly apt political metaphor. Just as courtly love's male lover served his lady as though she were his feudal lord and master and he her vassal, to the extent that in Provençal or Spanish, and even some Arabic, poetry he addresses her with the masculine term "midons" (< Lat. *mea dominus*) or "mía señor" rather than "domina" or "señora" as her gender would usually require.

Art such as literature, as Grieve points out, is an agent in constructing cultural reality.<sup>82</sup> By extension of these concepts of literary theory to the stories told by the paintings, the inclusion of Flores and Blancaflor in the *LJ* can be read as constructing a national identity via the restoration of the Carolingian line in Spain via Bertha's marriage to Pepin. The artist commissioned to paint the courtly scenes in the cupolas of the Alhambra likely deviated from casket models to paint intentionally ambiguous messages into his painting so as to soften if not disguise a subversive message of courtly, that is European and Christian, superiority inherent in his casket models which might have offended his patron. Their specific motif of wrongful captivity, moreover, artistically illustrates Frederic Jameson's theory of the

<sup>81</sup> Alexander Cockburn examines the oedipal aspects of check-mate in *Idle Passion: Chess and the Dance of Death* (New York: Village Voice/Simon, 1974). This comparison also recalls the mystical check-mate union with God that St. Teresa of Ávila describes in Ch. 16 of her sixteenth-century *Camino de perfección*.

<sup>82</sup> Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflor*, 167 (see note 14).

political unconscious and Hayden White's theory of text as artifact by belying the overarching social, political and religious context behind both artists' employment of this metaphor—the Iberian Peninsula as symbolized by a captive maiden, saved, beloved and (re)conquered in turn by her European or Christian hero.

In addition to their shared theme of the game of chess as a metaphor for courtly love, both works of art are united by their use of the ludic metaphor which brings fictional, legendary or prototypical characters to life around a known and real game, and which is more, in an artistically-unexpected contextual location. Both these works of art stand out not only because of their inclusion of the game of Moorish import but also because of their surprising placement even within works for Muslim patrons or largely derived from Arabic texts. Whether decorating a Moorish palace or inverting the basic realism of physiognomic likenesses in Europe's first illustrated chess manual, the unusual appearance of these works playfully hints to the viewer that they are puzzles to be solved. Their intertextuality links both medieval Spanish chess paintings to other literary sources of damsels in distress rescued by heroes ultimately traceable to either the European cultural concept of courtly love or the legendary genealogy of the Spanish crown.



## Chapter 7

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### How Did the Queen Go Mad?













There is a short answer and a long answer to the question my title poses. The short answer is “we don’t know.” The long answer will occupy the remainder of this article, and it is not an answer so much as a gesture, an invitation to reread medieval chess literature afresh and reevaluate our understanding. In more prosaic language, the question I am posing is: how did the chess queen take on her modern movement? For this revolutionized the way chess is played, sharply distinguishing the modern game from its medieval parent. How did this happen? Not when and where or under what influences—these old questions have often been addressed and are still being readdressed—but, first, how did the medieval mind prepare itself for this change and, second, what is the mechanism this mindset triggered? These are questions that no one, to my knowledge—not even the enduring H. J. R. Murray—has carefully addressed in quite this way. We do know that, by the sixteenth century, chess writers began to refer to the game as *scacchi de la dama* and *scacchi alla rabiosa* in Italy, as *axedrez de la dama* in Spain, and as *échés de la dame enragée* in France.<sup>1</sup> No doubt the descriptive epithet Mad Lady refers to the queen’s modern movement, which combines the perpendicular move of the rook with the oblique move of the bishop. This is in contrast to the rules of late medieval chess<sup>2</sup> where the fers (the common medieval name for the queen<sup>3</sup>), after an

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<sup>1</sup> H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Chess* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 776.

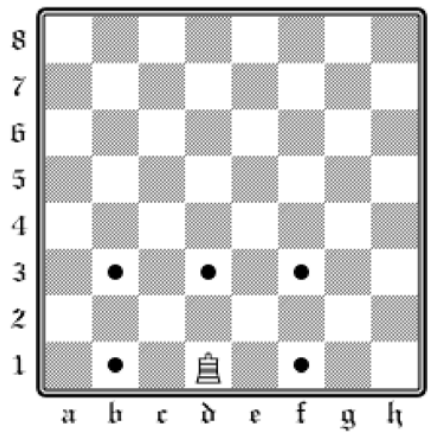
<sup>2</sup> Unlike modern chess, the rules of the medieval game were never universal, so there could be no appeal to a universal authority. Instead we find an array of *assizes*, “different codes of rules

initial leap,<sup>4</sup> could move only to an adjacent diagonal square.<sup>5</sup> As these early names for modern chess indicate, the faster movement of the queen is the key feature of the new game.

Fig- ure	typical name (L)	typical name (ver)	ModEng equivalent	Fig- ure	Fig- ure	typical name (L)	typical name (ver)	ModEng equivalent	Fig- ure
	rex	king	king			miles	knight	knight	
	ferzia	fers	queen			rochus	rook	rook	
	alfinus	alfin	bishop			pedes	pawn	pawn	
<div><div>•</div><div>(in the diagrams denotes squares which a piece in question may occupy on a single move)</div></div> <div><div>←</div><div>(in the diagrams denotes squares which a piece in question may pass through on a single move)</div></div>									

The following two diagrams show how the fers moved:

1. The initial leap move of the fers:



The fers on d1 can move to squares b1, b3, d3, f3, or f1, even if there are pieces occupying intervening squares. This leap is optional and restricted to the first move.

by which chess was played in different places or at different times” (Murray, *A History of Chess*, 455 [see note 1]). The two assizes most important to the modification of moves are the Spanish and Lombard (Murray, *A History of Chess*, 456 [see note 1]). When I refer to the medieval game in this article, it is primarily according to these assizes.

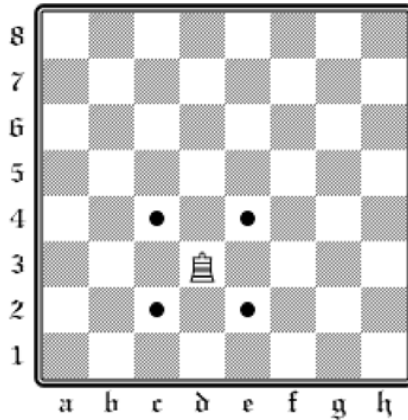
<sup>3</sup> The feminine noun *fers* is derived from the Persian *firzan* (vizier), the name for the central piece adjacent to the *shah* (king).

<sup>4</sup> This is described by Murray as a feature of the Lombard assize, what we may call the Lombard Leap (*A History of Chess*, 462 [see note 1]). Medieval chess is characterized by leaping moves, modern chess by gliding moves. In the medieval game, only the rook had a gliding movement. In the modern game, only the knight and the act of castling retain the leaping movement.

<sup>5</sup> Simply for clarity, when I speak of a piece moving under the older rules, I will use the older name; likewise I will use the modern name when referring to the modern movement. Thus fers is the older name for queen and alfin is the older name for bishop. Historically, however, there is no direct correspondence between nomenclature and movement.

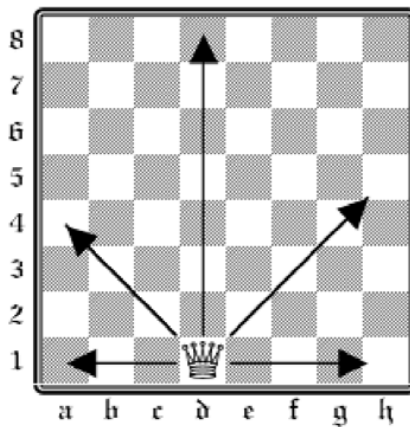


## 2. The regular movement of the fers:



The fers can move one square diagonally. The regular movement was carried over from *shatranj*, the Persian form of chess; the initial leap move is a European innovation that we find in Spain by the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. “This would appear to have been the earliest modification of move attempted in Europe”—a modification that spread across Europe.<sup>6</sup> The movement of the modern queen is significantly more powerful:

## 3. Queen’s movement:

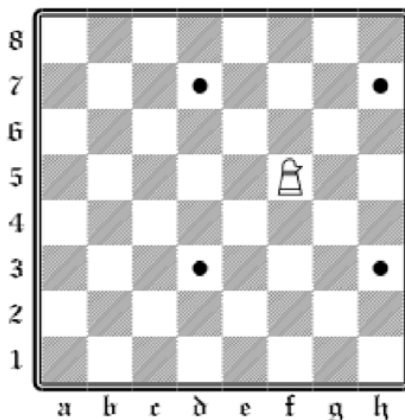


Here the queen is not restricted to an adjacent square, and she has given up her initial leap to glide in perpendicular and oblique movements.

<sup>6</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 457–59 (see note 1).

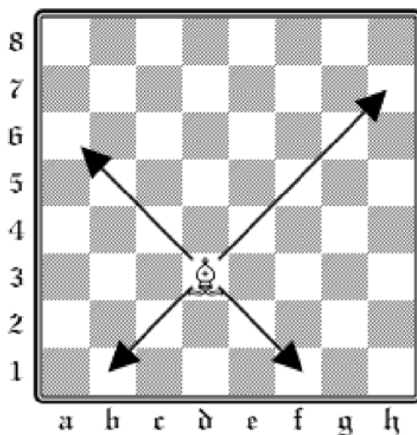
Although the new power of the queen is the most dominant feature of the new game, it was not the only piece to have undergone a more powerful alteration from leaping to gliding movement. The following two diagrams show the movements of the medieval alfin<sup>7</sup> and its modern counterpart, the bishop.

4. The movement of the alfin:



As with the fers, the alfin leaps to these squares even over intervening pieces.

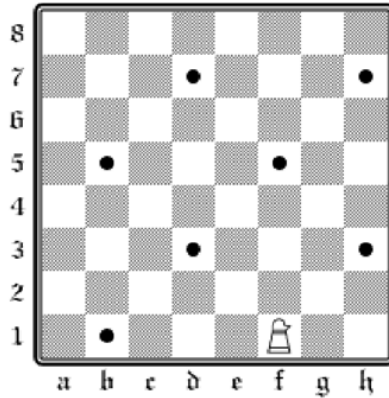
5. The movement of the bishop:



<sup>7</sup> The name *alfin* is derived from *al-fil* (elephant), its counterpart in the Persian game.

As with the queen, the bishop becomes more powerful, able to occupy 32 squares in a gliding movement. Restricted to moving obliquely, the alfin can occupy no more than eight squares on the board, making it even weaker than a pawn:

6. Eight possible squares the alfin can occupy:



Chess historians have been more interested in addressing where and when this redefining change of piece movement occurred. Here too the answer is still “we don’t know” with any precision. As Murray concisely puts it, “we are left without definite evidence for the time and place of its [new chess’s] first appearance, the reason for its invention, and the explanation of its rapid spread throughout Europe.”<sup>8</sup> But we can say with some confidence that the modern game was being played, by the last decades of the fifteenth century, in Italy, Spain, and perhaps elsewhere in southern Europe. Murray supposes it originated in Italy, but leaves the question open. Recently, the late IM Ricardo Calvo has tried to establish Valencia as the point of origin and his research has convinced popular historians Govert Westerveld and Marilyn Yalom.<sup>9</sup> They regard Queen Isabella of Castile as an important, even crucial, influence. I find this search for a historical queen akin to the old biographical fallacy of attempting to identify a historical woman behind the *dame* celebrated in verse by the old love poets. That has not helped us read the texts nor understand the invention of love. Likewise the search for an historical queen or series of queens

<sup>8</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 777 (see note 1).

<sup>9</sup> Ricardo Calvo, *Lucena: la Evasión en Ajedrez del Converso Calisto* (Barcelona: Perea Ediciones, 1997); Govert Westerveld, *De Invloed van de Spaanse Koningin Isabel la Católica op de Nieuwe Sterke Dame in de Oorsprong van het Dam en Moderne Schjaakspel* (Amsterdam: Beniel-Spanje, 1997) [English summary: “The influence of the Spanish queen Isabel la Católica on the new powerful dama in the origin of the draughts and modern Chess game.” *History of Chess*, [http://www.chess-poster.com/english/chesmayne/the\\_queen.htm](http://www.chess-poster.com/english/chesmayne/the_queen.htm), last accessed March 15, 2011]; Marilyn Yalom, *Birth of the Chess Queen: A History* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

behind the chess queen does not help us to better understand the chess literature nor the dynamic phenomenon of the game itself.

The assumption by all has been that, whenever and wherever the change occurred, it was immediate and complete: both the queen and the bishop were immediately played with their modern moves. Richard Eales confidently asserts: "There are no records of the new bishop and queen moves being tried independently: everywhere they were introduced as part of a coherent new system."<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, the older game quietly died out in the first quarter of the 16th century.<sup>11</sup> Eales is right, of course, but, as we know, extant evidence is often a matter of happy accident. After all, there is not a single indisputable record extant throughout Europe for half a millennium of any game actually played by the old rules. If there were separate experiments with queen or bishop, the germinal period may have been too brief or too limited geographically to have left any trace. The absence of evidence is no proof that the modern movements appeared in a single system. So, what evidence can we find that might suggest how the changes occurred? I suggest two kinds. First, review earlier chess texts that suggest or imagine a more powerful fers and see if they also suggest a more powerful alfin, which would be consistent with the two pieces changing their moves simultaneously. Second, use logical deduction in comparing the old and modern movements to establish the most likely sequence of change.

I have assembled here, roughly in chronological order, a small group of medieval texts prior to about 1475 that appear to imagine a fers more powerful than her limited oblique movement warrants. Some texts strongly suggest a more extended movement. This group is by no means exhaustive, but it includes the most well-known and significant texts.

The earliest text, the twelfth-century "Elegia de ludo scachorum," of which a copy is included in the famous *Carmina Burana* MS, makes this curious comment about the fers, which the poet calls *coniuga*: "Rex manet incaptus, subtracta coniuge solus;/ Coniuge subtracta, rex manet in tabula" (no. 210, st. 17).<sup>12</sup> The poet also tells us this about pawns (masculine) promoted to ferses (feminine): "Vir factus mulier regi ferus arbiter heret,/ Imperat et regnat, hinc capit, inde labat" (no. 210, st. 9). As Murray has it:

undoubtedly the chief difficulty of the poem is the position allotted to the medieval chess Queen. Unfortunately the move of this piece is not given; but when speaking of the progress of the game and the diminution of the pieces by capture, the poet continues: 'The King alone remains untaken when his wife is taken away: when his

<sup>10</sup> Richard Eales, *Chess: The History of a Game* (New York: Facts on File, 1985), 72.

<sup>11</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 779 (see note 1).

<sup>12</sup> Alfons Hilka and Otto Schumann, with Wilhelm Meyers, eds. *Carmina Burana*. I. band: Text. 3. Die Trink- und Spielerlieder—Die geistlichen Dramen, (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1970).

wife is taken away, nothing is of value on the board'<sup>13</sup>. . . ; while of the Queen obtained by the promotion of a Pawn it is said: 'The man become a woman abides a lord wielding royal power, he governs and reigns, here he takes, there he gives way'. . . The writer could hardly have said more had he been writing of the Queen in the reformed game, with her greatly extended power of move. . . I think it has to do with moralizing influences. . . Similar exaggerated valuations of the Queen are not unknown in medieval literature. . . In most of these cases, however, the poetical justification for the high estimation is more evident.<sup>14</sup>

It is curious and unfortunate that the rule for the queen's movement is omitted—more than a few moralities are likewise guilty of omitting crucial technical information. Murray admits that the poet is describing the modern queen, but his scholarly scruples oblige him to explain it away as "poetic justification." The exaggerated valuation may be more significant than Murray supposed. The poem stands somewhat apart from the other didactic efforts; it offers no more moral imperative and little more instruction than the surrounding songs of drinking, gambling, and the good life in the *Carmina Burana* MS. The line preserved only in that manuscript, "Omnis enim 'Mattum!' clamat, 'Mattum!' sibi 'Mattum!'" (Everyone shouts, "Mate! Mate! Mate!" to him), like the accompanying illustration of chess players, bespeaks actual play in the tavern or courtyard.<sup>15</sup> In this context, the strength of the queen expressed here may have some correspondence with its actual power on the board—precisely what we cannot know. The statement about the promoted pawn recalls a similar remark in the later Hebrew poem of Rabbi Shlomo ben Mazel Tov: "And he will draw near to the dwelling-place of the king" (st. 21).<sup>16</sup>

In contrast, the *alfin* seems to have its original limited leap move. The passage is obscure and suffers considerable variation in the manuscripts. Hilka and Schumann (no. 210, st. 15) follow Murray's reading: "*Alficus trivius cornuta fronte timendus, / Ante retro comites decipit invigiles.*"<sup>17</sup> The "three ways" (*trivius*) apparently refers to its leaping a square, the total distance being three squares.<sup>18</sup> If it is not merely a very curious coincidence, it may be significant that the poem is most obscure only in describing the moves of the *fers* and *alfin*, the two pieces whose move change would alter the character of the game so profoundly.

<sup>13</sup> Murray reads: *nil ualet in tabula* (*A History of Chess*, 516 [see note 1]).

<sup>14</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 504–05 (see note 1).

<sup>15</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, the plate facing 503 (see note 1).

<sup>16</sup> Victor Keats, *Chess in Jewish History and Hebrew Literature* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995), 111.

<sup>17</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 504 (see note 1).

<sup>18</sup> On the medieval method of reckoning the distance of squares, see Murray, *A History of Chess*, 457 (see note 1).

In contrast to the obscurity of the “Elegia de ludo scachorum,” Gautier de Coinci’s early 13<sup>th</sup>-century *Miracles de la Sainte Vierge* is the most explicit text extant that imagines more extensive queen movements.

Autres fierces<sup>19</sup> ne vont qu’un point,  
 Mais ceste cort si tost et point  
 Qu’ainc qu’anemis ait del sien pris,  
 L’a si lacié et si souspris  
 Ne seit quel part traire se doie.  
 Ceste fiece le mate en roie,  
 Ceste fiece la mate en l’angle,  
 Ceste fiece li tolt la jangle,  
 Ceste fiece li tolt sa proie,  
 Ceste fiece toz jors l’aspoie,  
 Ceste fiece toz jors le point,  
 Ceste fiece de point en point  
 Par fine force le dechace. (vv. 281–93)<sup>20</sup>

[Other ferses move but one square, but this one invades so quickly and sharply that before the devil has taken any of hers, she has him so tied up and so worried that he doesn’t know where he should move. This fers mates him in straight lines; this fers mates him at an angle [or, in the corner]; this fers takes away his bad-mouthing; this fers takes away his prey; this fers always torments him; this fers always goads him; this fers drives him out from square to square by superior strength.]

Murray quotes these lines, but misreads vv. 292–93 to state “conclusively that the fers had only its weak Muslim move.”<sup>21</sup> But Gautier is describing a “king hunt,” a well-known tactic in the Middle Ages as well as today, and it is the King which is moving one square at a time: “this fers drives him (*le*) out from square to square by [her] superior strength.” The limited fers-move lacks the “superior strength” to chase a king. In fact, in the medieval game, the king can chase the fers. Moreover, Gautier explicitly states that “*Other* ferses move but one square, but *this* one invades very quickly and sharply.” He is clearly contrasting his imagined superior fers/virgin with the traditionally weak fers as if presenting the reader with a different assize from what they would be familiar with. Although this is religious poetry in praise of the Virgin Mary, not a technical treatise (thus the other pieces are not addressed), Gautier is remarkably explicit as he shows just how his fers is superior: she moves quickly

<sup>19</sup> Gautier is making an obvious word play on the name of the piece, *fierce* (fers), reading it as *vierge*, yet this depends on understanding fers as queen, as Murray says (*A History of Chess*, 749 [see note 1]).

<sup>20</sup> V. F. Koenig, ed., *Les Miracles de la Sainte Vierge*, Gautier de Coinci (4 vols, Geneva: Droz, 1966–1970).

<sup>21</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 749 (see note 1).

(i.e., more than one square per move, v. 282); she move laterally (like a rook,<sup>22</sup> v. 286); she moves obliquely (like a bishop—although “*mate en l’angle*,” v. 287, also describes a favorite mating position that Gautier employs elsewhere); she can chase and corner a king (vv. 287–88); she can protect all other pieces (v. 289). Compare this description with the above diagrams of the movements of the fers and queen (figures 1, 2, and 3) and Gautier’s description clearly mirrors that of the latter. Here is the earliest known description of the modern queen-movement—nearly 250 years before the first recorded modern game. Whether Gautier or anyone he knew actually played chess this way is impossible to know. As we noted, every court had its own assizes or “house rules” for chess, some marked by highly unusual divergences. But even if Gautier is not basing his divine fers on an actual assize, his is still the greater accomplishment, conceiving fully what has remained latent in the medieval imagination: a more powerful fers. The step from conceiving to practicing is much smaller.

The “Verses upon the Game of Ishkaki” is of uncertain date and authorship. It is attributed to the twelfth-century Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (1088–1167?) by his modern editor. One scholar regards it as an anonymous sixteenth-century imitation.<sup>23</sup> There are obvious technical difficulties in dating it to the twelfth century, but no compelling reason to date it so late as the sixteenth century, because it seems to describe the medieval game. At least, the rook is considered “second to the king” (v. 29), so the queen does not have her full modern movement. Rather, “The queen can go to all four corners; there is no one who can say a word against her. / As swift as a gazelle and as strong as a lion, / she can fight courageously, effortlessly” (vv. 32–33).<sup>24</sup> It is not clear if this means she is limited to moving obliquely one square at a time or not. The poet clearly emphasizes only the extensiveness of the rook-move. However, the phrases “no one can say a word against her” (that is, no one can make her stop—used by Ibn Yehia to describe the rook-move<sup>25</sup>) and “swift as a gazelle” seem to indicate something greater than the limited fers-move, something more like the bishop-move. Only the powerful rook and knight are also described with adjectives of swiftness. Similarly ambiguous, the promoted pawn can “go up to any corner at any time” (v. 22), which recalls the rook, who “can move at any

<sup>22</sup> In line 286, the phrase *en roie* refers to the land between ploughed rows, that is, in a straight line. That this phrase indicates the movement of the rook is supported by a similar phrase in *Raoul de Cambrai*: “Il a son roc par force en roie mis” [“He has *malgré soi* set his rook in line”—perhaps an open file or back rank], P. Meyer and A. Longnon, eds. *Raoul de Cambrai, chanson de geste*. Publications de la Société des anciens textes français (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1887) v. 1587.

<sup>23</sup> Viz., Steinschneider, in Keats, *Chess in Jewish History and Hebrew Literature*, 117 (see note 16).

<sup>24</sup> The translation is Keats’s (see note 16).

<sup>25</sup> Keats, *Chess in Jewish History and Hebrew Literature*, 77 (see note 16).

moment from the side to a corner" (v. 28).<sup>26</sup> The text is at least suggestive of a fers moving like the bishop.

Ambiguity also marks the description of the queen in the Hebrew chess poem of Bonsenior Ibn Yehia, active before 1450, perhaps closer to 1400.<sup>27</sup> He saves the fers for last:

But the woman is to us a kind of lordly lady. Indeed she sits at the top of the highest places over the city; restless and refractory is she. She girds her loins with strength in travelling, and her feet do not stay in her house. Rather she passes into houses which are in any place lateral and oblique. Near that one three are visited which are marvelous. And when initially she has grown to fulfill her desire, how lovely are her steps! Her strides are from house to oblique house, one against another.<sup>28</sup>

This difficult poem is infused with biblical allusions which complicates attempts to read technically. The reference to lateral and diagonal movement is probably the initial leap move. It is not clear whether the fers' subsequent diagonal movement must be accomplished one square per move or all at once, but it is easier to imagine the latter, given what else is said of the piece. The restless temperament ascribed to her, the refusal to stay at home, contrasts sharply with the usual European attitude, in which the fers stays close by the king in a defensive capacity. Technically there is reason for this defensive strategy since the fers-move is too weak for her to be used effectively in offense.

Francisco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (written in 1467 though not printed until 1499) offers a similar ambiguity: "Ma la Regina per omni quadrato del suo colore que primo fermoe la sedia. Et bene e che sempre propinqua segui dogni lato li marito suo" [But the queen [moves] through all squares of the color of that which she first sat upon. And well it is that she always properly follows her husband].<sup>29</sup> The implication is that the fers' movement could be open ("*per omni quadrato*," rather than, say, square by square), although she is limited by the older practice of defending the king. This could perhaps mark the early transitional phase from the medieval fers to the modern queen in Italy: she acquired the modern bishop's move but this new movement

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<sup>26</sup> To read this perhaps over-literally, a piece that can occupy all four corners of the board is not limited to remaining on its color of origin, which is the case for fers and bishop, and thus more powerful. If the poet is embracing this reading—which is doubtful—he may merely be indicating that pawns can be promoted on both light and dark squares, a rather banal point.

<sup>27</sup> Keats, *Chess in Jewish History*, 74–75 (see note 16).

<sup>28</sup> Translated after the Latin of Thomas Hyde. Hyde's texts are reproduced in facsimile in Keats (*Chess in Jewish History*, 219–24 [see note 16]). Keats's translation reads: "She sits at the top of the high places above the city. She is restless and determined. She girds her loins with strength. Her feet stay not in her house. She moves in every direction and into every corner. Her evolutions are wonderful, her spirit untiring. How comely are her footsteps as she moves diagonally, one step after another, from square to square!" (77–78).

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Murray, *A History of Chess*, 748 (see note 1).



has not yet altered a long-established defensive strategy. From a practical standpoint, it is difficult to imagine that such a phase could have lasted long. Moreover, if her move changed once, it could change yet again for greater power. And if the queen could become yet more powerful, the nearly worthless alfin could take over the oblique glide of the reformed fers.

This is also clearly the case in the similar chess game with Fortune metaphor used by Charles d'Orleans in both French and English versions of this ballade:<sup>30</sup>

Et par meschief, que maudite soit elle!  
 A ma Dame prise soudainement;  
 Par quoy suy mat, je le voy clerement,  
 Se je ne fais une Dame nouvelle. (Ballade LVIII, vv. 6–9)<sup>31</sup>

O woo worthe she that my game ouyrthrew  
 For tane she hath my lady welaway  
 That y am matt this may y se and say  
 Withouten so be y make a lady newe. (Ballade 61, vv. 2115–18)<sup>32</sup>

Charles was reputed to be an accomplished chess player, according to contemporaries and a note in a manuscript from his library.<sup>33</sup> We need but consider under what circumstances the addition of a fers would allow a king to avoid being mated. Having examined several possibilities, I cannot see how an additional fers can force a draw where otherwise the game is lost.<sup>34</sup> The addition of a bishop or a queen, however, can thwart mate in many instances.

<sup>30</sup> Murray did not think highly of this chess metaphor and thought the debt to *The Book of the Duchess* obvious (*A History of Chess*, 752 [see note 1]). The connection to Chaucer's poem, however, is not so much in the metaphor, which is a common enough concept among medieval chess players, but in the diametric contrast—almost parodic—of the respective fidelity of the poet-lovers. The chess passage in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* is explored fully in Mark N. Taylor, "Chaucer's Knowledge of Chess," *The Chaucer Review* 38.4 (2004): 299–313.

<sup>31</sup> Pierre Champion, ed., *Charles d'Orléans. Poésies*, Vol. I. Classiques français du Moyen Âge (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1966).

<sup>32</sup> Robert Steele and Mabel Day, eds., *The English Poems of Charles d'Orléans*. Early English Text Society; original series, 215 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

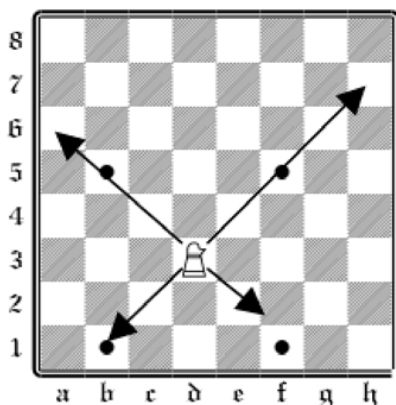
<sup>33</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 431 (see note 1).

<sup>34</sup> A fers cannot prevent mate against an opponent with the advantage of one or two rooks or a rook and knight, for example. It may be that in rare instances involving pawns and minor pieces, the presence of a fers can effect this outcome, but not in the most common patterns. I confess I have not explored the subtleties of a fers in preventing mate by two knights, but it seems unlikely given the knight's leaping move, nullifying the blocking power of the fers. In certain instances, the presence of a pawn can affect mate; the fers, however, can move backward. On the complexity of double-knight mates in the modern game, see, for example, Jan Hein Donner, "Exceptio Chapaiana," *The King: Chess Pieces*, ed. Tim Krabbé and Max Pam, trans. Richard Weger (Alkmaar, Netherlands: New In Chess, 2006), 229–44. For advice on the some of the finer points of determining drawn and lost endgames, I am indebted to my son, Paul Taylor, an Expert level player and national scholastic chess champion. The conclusions are my own.

This brief survey suggests that some medievals were describing a fers whose movement was either as powerful or less powerful than the modern queen but seemingly more powerful than the medieval fers. Even if we wish to explain away each instance, as Murray has done, the cumulative evidence is clear: the medieval mind could imagine a fers moving like a queen long before we have any evidence of this actually in place. The evidence also indicates that this movement was not universally understood in the same way. In at least one instance we have the full queen-move, in others something closer perhaps to the bishop-move. Often the descriptions of the fers-move and alfin-move are more obscure than that of the other pieces, as if the author were unable or unwilling to clarify among an array of possibilities. The evidence suggests that we might more carefully regard the change in movement not as a single stroke occurring at the end of the fifteenth century, but rather as a series of innovations throughout the later Middle Ages—local, tentative, but always in the direction of greater power and speed. Murray also: “The reform [the modern game] was historically only the culmination of a long series of experiments with the moves of the pieces, carried out during the medieval period.”<sup>35</sup>

If we are willing suspend common belief that the queen’s revolutionary modern movement appeared suddenly and decisively in the later fifteenth century, if we are willing to consider a more general evolution, what can an examination of the nature of the changes tell us? Consider the bishop-move against the alfin-move:

7. Alfin’s and bishop’s movements superimposed:



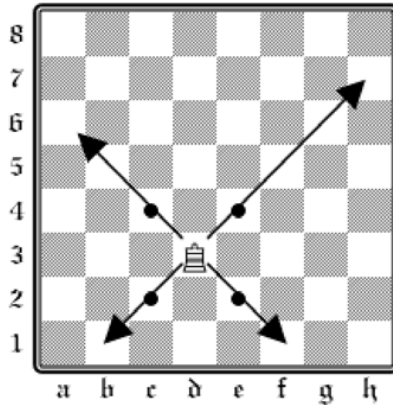
The alfin jumps over a diagonal square (like a checker, whether or not there is an intervening piece), while the bishop glides freely along its diagonals. The

<sup>35</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 417 (see note 1).

mode and distance of movement changes but the direction does not. It undergoes two basic alterations of manner that transforms a very weak piece into a quite useful one, in value generally on par with the knight. Although there are two steps involved, it is easy to understand how such a change could have occurred at once; both mode and distance of manner are inter-related.

The usual short oblique fers-move is of the same direction and mode of the bishop-move, simply shorter in distance:

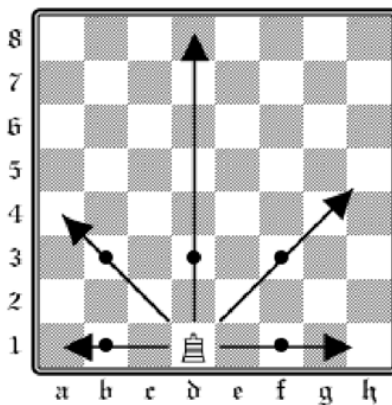
8. Fers's and bishop's movements superimposed:



The fers-move, one square diagonally, undergoes a single alteration: in manner its distance changes, which must occur at once because there are no steps involved.

The initial leap of the fers is of a similar nature as the queen-move in direction, but neither in mode nor distance:

9. Fers' leap and Queen's movement:



Moreover, this leap is restricted to the first move which introduces a third manner, time. All three alterations required to turn a fers into a queen transform a piece which already served the function of guarding the king—a useful function to the medieval mind—into a piece whose power is all out of proportion to that of the other pieces (the modern queen is generally worth three minor pieces). The alteration is in three steps, of which two (mode and distance) are inter-related. Thus the development from fers to queen could have occurred at once or in two separate steps.

From this synchronic analysis of direction and manner of piece movement we can establish a hierarchy based on degree of alteration:

Steps:	Piece move:	Change in direction:	manner (mode + distance + time):
0	fers	—	0
0	alfin	—	0
1	fers cum bishop	0	0 + 1 + 0
2	alfin cum bishop	0	1 + 1 + 0
3	fers cum queen	0	1 + 1 + 1

The fers and the alfin in their medieval movements represent the zero base. As we have seen, there is actually never any alteration of direction of movement in either piece, as long as we remember the special nature of the fers's initial leap. As we consider changes in manner, the smallest alteration is merely extending the fers's regular movement to that of the bishop, which is merely a difference of distance (adjacent square to open number). Moving the alfin like the bishop represents a somewhat greater alteration of manner, involving both mode (leaping to gliding) and distance. The greatest alteration, however, is replacing the fers' initial leap with extended gliding movements and making this its regular movement, not restricted in time. Assuming development from simpler to more complex, from small steps to greater steps, this is the most logical arrangement. Moreover, this hierarchy does not need to link fers and alfin, thus there is no need to see both pieces changing their movement simultaneously. If we view this hierarchy diachronically, is there any corresponding evidence? Some of our sample texts—ibn Yehia, in particular—suggest that in Spain by the fifteenth century there could have been an assize in which the fers moved like the bishop and still retained the initial leap. In fact, if the change indeed occurred in stages, it should naturally have begun with the Fers. First, the medieval mind could already imagine a more powerful fers, while there is no evidence of imagining a more powerful alfin. Second, if the change began with the alfin, all the steps in shifting from fers-move to queen-move would have had to occur all at once, since both pieces could not have had identical movements. Moreover, it runs counter to the principle of evolution: simpler

steps culminating in greater complexity. As we have seen, the fers began to change her movement first in the medieval imagination over the course of a few centuries. Thus, it is reasonable to see the fers-move shift first to the bishop-move, and that the alfin's shift to the bishop-move occurred as or after the fers had shifted further to the queen-move. What we cannot know, however, is whether these changes occurred in actual play over the course of a century, a decade, a month, or a single day.

There is an old maxim among chess players: "When you see a good move, keep looking for a better one."<sup>36</sup> I regard this hypothesis as a good candidate move in our effort to understand the game historically. But I know we need to keep looking for something better. One need not even agree with my thesis to understand that, although we don't know precisely how the queen took on her modern movement, any more than we know where this first occurred, or under what circumstances or influences, this research indicates that a tentative conclusion based on Murray's work is not assured. Students of chess history are incredibly fortunate to have such a comprehensive work of solid scholarship. The down side is that the size and weight of this monument tends to inhibit further study. Murray is so good and so complete and so enduring that it is easy to fall into overdependence, to lack a sufficiently strong imperative to redo his work. I think it is safe to say that we do not even know to what extent Murray's ninety-nine year-old work needs to be revised. My investigation suggests that we must return to the medieval texts and read them afresh. In some cases we need to return to the manuscripts and reread a text before we can reread it. Here I have offered an instance where rereading the texts can, if not establish a completely new theory, at least cast serious doubt upon existing conclusions about the queen.

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<sup>36</sup> This maxim is often attributed to Emanuel Lasker or some other modern champion. Its earliest extant appearance is found in an Arabic treatise of al-Lajlaj quoting his unsurpassed master, as-Suli (d. 946) (Murray, *A History of Chess*, 246 [see note 1]).



### Part III: Playing Games with Chess and Allegory





## Chapter 8

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### Playing with Memory: The Chessboard as a Mnemonic Tool in Medieval Didactic Literature

In *The Book of Memory*, Mary Carruthers writes: “treating the memory as though it were a flat area divided linearly into columns within a grid seems clearly medieval.”<sup>1</sup> The most famous grid in medieval culture may very well have been the chessboard. Imported from India through Persia, chess arrived in the West during the eleventh century, and despite a difficult acculturation, the game began to spread widely in the second half of the twelfth century.<sup>2</sup> As new technologies tend to influence a culture’s concept of memory—for instance, we now speak of “photographic memory”—one has to wonder: how did, if it did at all, the emergence and spread of chess in the West provide a new model to define memory? In an attempt to answer this question, I would like to put forth a study of three texts in order to interrogate them as related to medieval arts of memory. The first is the late thirteenth-century best seller, the *Liber de moribus hominum vel officii nobilium sive super ludo scacchorum* by the Dominican Jacques de Cessoles, that depicts an ideal society according to a chess model.<sup>3</sup> At the end of the fourteenth century, two authors writing in

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<sup>1</sup> Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 10 (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 129.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Pastoureau, “L’arrivée du jeu d’échecs en Occident. Histoire d’une acculturation difficile,” *Une Histoire symbolique du Moyen Âge occidental*. Librairie du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 269–91. See also H. J. R. Murray, *A History of Chess* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913).

<sup>3</sup> On the idea of the text’s status as a best-seller, see Jacques Berlioz, “Le Livre du jeu d’échecs, un best seller médiéval,” *L’Histoire* 243 (May 2000), 20–21. For the Latin text, see Ernst Köpke’s

French became inspired by this allegory. First, Évrart de Conty, Charles V's physician, wrote a long narrative in verse, *Les Eschés amoureux*, around 1370–1380.<sup>4</sup> He comments on this poem in *Le Livre des eschez amoureux moralisés*, written in prose before 1405, the year he died.<sup>5</sup> In both these texts, the chessboard is more of a courtly than a political model, as it provides a stage for amorous confrontations between the narrator and a maiden.<sup>6</sup> Then, in 1389, Philippe de Mézières, when he was the tutor of Charles VI, the young ruling king, wrote *Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, the third book of which is almost entirely based on a *moral eschequier*.<sup>7</sup> The repeated choice of a chessboard as a trope to structure didactic content in these texts speaks to its importance in the context of a typically medieval memorial culture.<sup>8</sup>

All three authors employ the chessboard allegorically, and even though generic distinctions are present, all these texts have a didactic purpose. The *Liber de moribus hominum* is a collection of *exempla* wherein preachers may find

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edition in *Jahresbericht der Mittheilungen aus den Handschriften der Ritter-Akademie zu Brandenburg*, II, Brandenburg, 1879. For a medieval translation in French, see Jacques de Cessoles, *Le Jeu des eschaz moralisé, traduction de Jean Ferron (1347)*, ed. Alain Collet. Classiques français du Moyen Âge (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999). Henceforth, I refer to Jacques de Cessoles's text as the *Liber de moribus hominum*. In the expansion of her thesis, Mary Carruthers explicitly mentions Jacques de Cessoles's text, see *The Book of Memory*, 144 (see note 1). She also refers to Raymond D. di Lorenzo's article, "The Collection Form and the Art of Memory in the 'Libellus super ludo scachorum' of Jacobus de Cessolis," *Mediaeval Studies* 35 (1973): 205–21. I would like to follow this approach by widening the *corpus* to other texts subsequent to Jacques de Cessoles's.

<sup>4</sup> About this poem that some believe to have been written by Évrart de Conty, see Françoise Guichard-Tesson's recent works: Françoise Guichard-Tesson, "Évrart de Conty, poète, traducteur et commentateur," *Aristotle's Problemata in different times and tongues*, ed. Pieter de Leemans and Michèle Goyens. *Mediaevalia Lovaniensia—Series 1/Studia XXXIX* (Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2006), 145–74, and, in the same volume, Caroline Boucher, "Les *Eschés amoureux* d'Évrart de Conty", appendix to "Des problèmes pour exercer l'entendement du lecteur: Évrart de Conty, Nicole Oresme et la recherche de la nouveauté," 175–197. This version in verse is not entirely edited at this point. See the following partial editions: Christine Kraft, *Liebesgarten-Allegorie der Echecs amoureux, Kritische Ausgabe und Kommentar* (New York, Bern, Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1977); Gianmario Raimondi, "Les *Eschés amoureux*. Studio preparatorio ed edizione," I, *Pluteus*, 8–9 (1990–1998): 67–241 and II, *Pluteus*, 10 (1999–2000), 39–158. Daniel E. O'Sullivan and Gregory Heyworth are currently preparing the first complete edition of the poem.

<sup>5</sup> See Évrart de Conty, *Le Livre des eschez amoureux moralisés*, ed. Françoise Guichard-Tesson and Bruno Roy. Bibliothèque du Moyen Français (Montréal: Ceres, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> This statement needs to be qualified. As Jenny Adams has noticed, *Les Eschés amoureux* and *Le Livre des eschez amoureux moralisés* "amplify the connections between individual desire and social organization" and they "position romantic love as the foundation for a stable political community," Jenny Adams, *Power Play: The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 59.

<sup>7</sup> Philippe de Mézières, *Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, ed. George William Coopland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

<sup>8</sup> "It is my contention that medieval culture was fundamentally memorial," Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 8 (see note 1).

inspiration for their sermons. Didactic speeches are integrated in *Les Eschés amoureux*: the longest one is Pallas's, which covers almost twenty thousand verses. The prose gloss is a "moralization" of the initial poem and comments on more specifically the chess game. Philippe de Mézières's *Songe du vieil pelerin*, explicitly intended for Charles VI, was composed in the great tradition of the *miroirs des princes*. These texts, whether they be anthologies of *exempla*, encyclopedias of love for young aristocrats or handbooks for good governance, all fit moral, amorous or political content onto a chess grid.

## An Organizing Grid

If Jacques de Cessoles's anthology was very successful, it is, among other things, because of its formal originality.<sup>9</sup> The Dominican did not choose to organize his *exempla* along an alphabetic or a logical order, as most compilers did. Rather, he integrates edifying anecdotes in the allegorical outline of the chess game. The *Liber de moribus hominum* comprises four books. The first one relates the game's legendary origins; the second one is about the pieces Jacques de Cessoles calls "nobles" (*nobiles*): the king, the queen, the bishops, the knights and the rooks; the third one studies the pieces standing for the people (*populares*), i.e., the pawns; the last book is devoted to the allegorical interpretation of the pieces' movements.

Since it was Dominicans who translated the ancient arts of memory, Jacques de Cessoles undoubtedly read them.<sup>10</sup> As explained in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, an anonymous text attributed in the Middle Ages to Cicero, and as further developed in Cicero's *De Oratore*, the techniques of the arts of memory were devised as architectural mnemonics. Frances Yates has shown, commenting on Simonide's anecdote, that for ancient orators a good memory was based on an ordered setting.<sup>11</sup> The first step consisted in determining *loci* to be imprinted on the orator's mind. The most common choice was a palace, in which different rooms provided the spaces in which any and all mental contents could be placed. These were called *imagines*: the shapes, signs or symbols of things to be memorized. Each image is precisely located within the

<sup>9</sup> In his edition, Alain Collet shows, however, that this success is due to various reasons: "c'est dans la coïncidence et la superposition d'un certain nombre de facteurs d'ordres différents et à l'origine étrangers les uns aux autres qu'il faut chercher, selon nous, un début d'explication à ce succès." (Collet, *Le Jeu des échecs*, 98 [see note 3]).

<sup>10</sup> "(...) the Dominican order, which was responsible for developing many of the most useful tools for the study of written texts during the thirteenth century, was simultaneously the most active single proponent and popularizer of memory as an art, and especially of the principles of Tully.", Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 154 (see note 1).

<sup>11</sup> Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1966).

given structure so a subsequent, orderly mental survey of those locations would ensure remembrance of those contents.<sup>12</sup> By choosing chess squares as *loci* instead of palace rooms, the preacher Jacques de Cessoles seems to have adapted mnemonic techniques inherited from Antiquity to a new model, that is, chess. His treatise was actually written as the arts of memory were undergoing a revival in the medieval West, and while the ancient memory model was three-dimensional, medieval mnemonics employed a two-dimensional structure.

A rewriting of the *Roman de la Rose*, the verse narrative *Les Eschés amoureux* relates the narrator's wandering until his arrival in the *Verger d'Amour*, where he plays chess with a maiden, only to be quickly checkmated. This *mat en l'angle*<sup>13</sup> must be understood allegorically: losing the game, the narrator loses his heart and falls in love with his opponent. If the whole text isn't based on the chessboard model, the item plays an important part during the amorous episode, which actually gives its title to the poem.<sup>14</sup> The pieces, which stand for courtly virtues, are placed on the chessboard; the grid structures the narrative content. In one of the two extant manuscripts, a representation of this organ-izing grid is integrated at the end of the game. In the Venice manuscript, a diagram indeed ends the ludic episode: covering half of a folio, the different pieces, pointing to the allegories they stand for, are placed on a grid.<sup>15</sup>

Jacques de Cessoles and Evrart de Conty take into account the rules of the game, even though they specifically focus on its allegorical meaning. The Dominican distinguishes between the two rows of pieces and gives an account of their respective moves, crediting them with a symbolic meaning. Evrart, once he has depicted in detail the chessboard and the pieces, relates the exchanges in the game.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, in Philippe de Mézières's *Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, the chess grid disregards the rules of the game and simply helps the authors organize his advice to the young aristocrat. In the third book of this

<sup>12</sup> For a reminder about the origins and the way architectural mnemotechnic works, see Yates, *The Art of Memory*, I (see note 1).

<sup>13</sup> car il y trouveront comment  
je fuy au jeu, n'a pas granment,  
d'une fierge en l'angle matéz  
(*Les Eschés amoureux*, ed. Gianmario Raimondi, 107, v. 9–11 [see note 4]).

<sup>14</sup> For a study of this problematic title, see Gregory Heyworth, "Textual Identity and the Problem of Convention. Recovering the Title of Dresden Oc. 66", *Textual Cultures: Text, Context, Interpretation* 1.2 (2006): 143–51. O'Sullivan and Heyworth intend to entitle their edition of this text *Les Eschéz d'Amours* (see note 4).

<sup>15</sup> *Les Eschés amoureux*, Biblioteca Marciana fr. app. 23, f. 66r. This chessboard is also represented in some manuscripts of the gloss in prose, see the description of the manuscripts by Guichard-Tesson and Roy in *Le Livre des eschez amoureux moralisés*, XIII–XVIII (see note 5).

<sup>16</sup> Actually, the opening of the game (the first nine exchanges) and the endgame (the last five exchanges) are described.

text, Queen Vérité educates young Moses, explicitly identified as Charles VI,<sup>17</sup> and a chessboard is used as a framework. In order to structure her speech, she divides the chessboard into four. Each corner of the grid is associated with a virtue.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the grid becomes an outline for moral and political developments: the chessboard is divided into four areas of fifteen squares where each area is related to a specific idea developed over fifteen subpoints.<sup>19</sup> Hence, Philippe de Mézières's model is static: the chessboard organizes the didactic content, but there are no pieces on the game set.

For the three authors, the chessboard is a tool that structures the text. It is an answer to one of the most important requirements of human recollection, which implies rigorous organization of the information to be memorized.<sup>20</sup> If Jacques de Cessoles, Evrart de Conty and Philippe de Mézières do not explicitly refer to ancient techniques, the choice of the chessboard certainly points to the influence of learning methods that do consider memory constraints: the habit of organizing one's thought in a grid might have played a part in this choice.<sup>21</sup> The chessboard is then a *locus* in which the authors will place their *imagines*.

## Inventing Images

Jacques de Cessoles assigns to each piece a social function. The king and the queen stand, of course, for the royal couple, the knights are obviously knights, but the bishops are judges, and the rooks represent the king's vicars. The eight pawns stand for the people, and the author sets each one apart and associates each of them to one or more social categories: the peasant, the craftsman, the notary and the weaver, the merchant and the money changer, the physician

<sup>17</sup> We can find this identification in "la table figuree," which explains all the allegories, in the prologue: "le jeune Moyse couronne" is "prins en figure pour le jeune roy du royaume de France, Charles VI<sup>e</sup> de son nom appelle" [the young and crowned Moses stands for the young king of France, called Charles VI], Philippe de Mézières, *Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, I, 110 (see note 7).

<sup>18</sup> "Cy traicte la royne des quatre poins principaulx de l'eschequier, c'est assavoir des quatre coins des cornieres de l'eschequier, qui sont prins en figure (. . .) pour les quatre vertuz, c'est assavoir verite, justice, paix et misericorde" [Here the queen speaks about the four principal points of the chessboard, i.e. the four corners of the chessboard, which stand for (. . .) the four virtues, i.e. truth, justice, peace and mercy], Philippe de Mézières, *Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, II, 177 (see note 7).

<sup>19</sup> For more on Philippe de Mézières's chessboard, see Joël Blanchard et Jean-Claude Mühlethaler, *Écriture et pouvoir à l'aube des temps modernes. Perspectives littéraires* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), 29.

<sup>20</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 130 (see note 1).

<sup>21</sup> About the influence of the arts of memory on the way one organizes a text, see the analysis of the enumeration of birds in the Verger d'Amour in *Le Roman de la Rose* by Nico van den Boogaard, "Le Roman de la Rose de Guillaume de Lorris et l'art de la mémoire," *Jeux de mémoire. Aspects de la mnémotechnie médiévale*, ed. Bruno Roy and Paul Zumthor (Montréal and Paris: Presses de l'Université de Montréal and Vrin, 1985), 85–90.

and the apothecary, the innkeeper and the host, the city keeper, the ribald, the gambler and the messenger. In order to distinguish the pieces, Jacques de Cessoles assigns to them various attributes relating to their social position. He seems to follow the ancient instructions as, according to the arts of memory, the images placed in a *locus* should be marked by an appropriate sign. In Jacques de Cessoles's treatise, the king wears a crown and purple; he sits on a throne, holds a globe in his right hand and a scepter in his left. The peasant grasps agricultural tools and the eighth pawn, representing the ribald, gambler and messenger, holds money, dice and a handful of letters. The pieces are thus depicted with a wealth of vivid details, which favor recollection.

A century later, Evrart de Conty draws inspiration from Jacques de Cessoles, with a more complex approach: he depicts pieces whose shields are adorned with painted images. The word *ymaquettes* is used in the text in verse, as a reminder of inherited ancient techniques:

Mais encor plus m'esmerveilloient  
De che que je vi, qu'il avoient,  
Aussy pour *descongnissanche*  
Ou pour aultre seignifianche,  
Trestuit fourmes et *ymaquettes*  
Par dedens lors escus pourtrettes  
De diverses choses [. . .].<sup>22</sup>

[But the pieces were fascinating because I saw they all had, as a distinctive sign, or for another reason, shapes and little images painted on their shields.]

The word *descongnissanche* may be considered as a translation for the Latin word *nota*, which refers to *images* in the arts of memory.<sup>23</sup> These distinctive adornments are essentially animals (a unicorn, an owl . . .) or symbolic items (a key, a mirror . . .). Each one embodies a courtly allegory: for instance, a rose is depicted on the maiden's second pawn, standing for *Beauté*, on one of the rooks a mermaid is depicted standing for *Bel Accueil*, the narrator's first pawn shows a dry tree that embodies *Oiseuse*, etc.

The chessboard refers both to an abstract, structuring geometric grid and to a concrete referent, the game board. Thus the embodied figures set on the table

<sup>22</sup> Kraft, *Liebesgarten-Allegorie*, 119, v. 1081–87, emphasis added (see note 4).

<sup>23</sup> "Imagines sunt formae quaedam et notae et simulacra eius rei quam meminisse volumus" ("The images are the shapes, the symbols and the representations of what we want to recall"), *Rhétorique à Herennius*, III, 29, ed. Guy Achard (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997), 115. Quintilian speaks about the signs that must be placed in the *loci*: "Tum quae scripserunt vel cogitatione complectuntur [et] aliquo signo quo moneantur notant" ("The following [problem] is to mark what we've written or mentally prepared with a peculiar sign"), *De Institutione oratoria*, XI, 2,19, ed. Jean Cousin. Volume VI (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1979), 211.

provide a suitable background for *ekphrasis*<sup>24</sup> and “salient,” easily memorized images.<sup>25</sup> Jacques de Cessoles and Evrart de Conty seem to literally follow the advice of the arts of memory, setting images in the locations that the chess grid provides. Some terms in the texts are very close to those used in ancient treatises, which might hint that Evrart in particular consciously applies a method inherited from architectural mnemotechnics and adapts it to the new model the chessboard provides. Madeleine Jeay has aptly shown, in regard to the *Livre des eschez amoureux moralisés*, that Evrart actually knew “l’art memorative des anciens”<sup>26</sup> and that he twice points out their usefulness in his commentary<sup>27</sup>.

Philippe de Mézières quickly leaves behind the visual suggestions of the game. He does not stress its physical dimensions; rather, any advice linked to each square on the chessboard remains abstract. The developments are not embodied by figures. To say it as an art of memory, there are no images in the locations the author has devised. However, by the end of Queen Vérité’s speech in the conclusion of *Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, the king is offered a small

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<sup>24</sup> An *ekphrasis* is a rhetorical term that originally refers to any kind of description and then, more specifically, to the description of a work of art. In *Les Eschès amoureux*, the beauty of the precious chessboard is highlighted and the item epitomizes a piece of art.

<sup>25</sup> Cicero discusses *imagines agentes* in his *De Oratore*, II, LXXXVII, 358, ed. Edmond Courbaud (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1966), 156.

<sup>26</sup> Madeleine Jeay, “La mythologie comme clé de mémorisation: la *Glose des Echecs amoureux*,” ed. Bruno Roy and Paul Zumthor, *Jeux de mémoire: aspects de la mnémotechnie médiévale*, 160 (see note 21).

<sup>27</sup> “La quinte chose, c’est memoire et recordacion des choses conceues et comprises, car qui ne retendroit en sa memoire les sentences comprises par devant et les conclusions, sy qu’il en souvenist au besoing prestement, ce ne seroit tout riens, car memoire parfait et embelist trop la science acquise; et pour ce fut l’art memorative des anciens philosophes trouvee pour conforter la memoire naturele aucunement, et de cest art fait Tullies mencion en sa *Rethorique*” [The fifth item is memory and the recording of things conjured and understood, because the one who does not retain in his memory first the premise and then the conclusion, so that he can recall them immediately, it would all be for nothing, for memory perfects and greatly embellishes any acquired knowledge; and for this was the memorative art discovered by the ancients: in order to reinforce natural memory somewhat, and it is of this art that Tullius makes mention in *On Rhetoric*] (Evrart de Conty, *Le Livre des eschez*, 98); “Memoire veult aussi que les choses trouvees et leur bonne ordenance et les belles paroles dessusdites aussi soient sy fermement fichies et sy fort imprimees en la memoire de l’orateur qu’il ne les puisse au besoing oublier. Et c’est un des plus neccesseres poins et ou il convient miex prendre garde, en cest cas quant la parole est longue. Et pour ce fait Tullies, qui moult fut sages, mencion en sa *Rethorique* de artificiele memoire et samble qu’il veuille enseigner come on peut par art la naturel memoire conforter et parfaire” [Memory also desires that the items learned and their proper order and the beautiful words spoken above be so firmly fixed and so deeply impressed into the mind of the orator that he cannot possibly forget them when they are needed. And one of the most necessary condition and one where you must be particularly careful is when the speech is long. And for this reason Tullius, who was exceedingly wise, discusses artificial memory in *On Rhetoric* and seems to desire to teach how one might reinforce and perfect natural memory in this way] (Evrart de Conty, *Le Livre des eschez*, 724 [see note 5]).

chessboard, which Vérité ties around his neck.<sup>28</sup> On each one of the sixty-four squares stands a precious stone that represents a virtue. Philippe de Mézières seems to use this reduplication to alter the abstract quality of previous long developments and synthesize them in an *ekphrasis*. The description is clearly not as precise as that of Evrart de Conty and details about the sixty-four virtues behind the precious stones are not provided. However, the item operates in the diegesis as a memorial image intended for the young king, as it is underlined that the small chessboard will allow Moses to remember the instructions from the former large moral chessboard:

[. . .] affin qu'il te souveigne souvent de la reverence et amour de Dieu et de noz saintes doctrines, tu porteras tousjours a ta poitrine en esperit cestui petit eschequier quarre, affin que tu ayes tousjours fresche memoire dudit eschequier et du mistere toutes les foiz que tes subgiez ou aultres voudront jouer aux eschez en ta royale majesté.<sup>29</sup>

[in order to remember reverence, God's love and our holy doctrines, you will always have, in your mind, this little square chessboard on your chest, in order to remind yourself of this chessboard and the mystery each time your subjects or other people will want to play chess with your royal majesty.]

### Preaching, Teaching, Learning

One can easily ascertain that the treatises on the arts of memory influenced preachers who favored mnemotechnics so as to remember their sermons. As for Jacques de Cessoles, for instance, the chessboard enables him to remember the sequence of the various *exempla*, since each anecdote is linked to a piece and its related virtue.<sup>30</sup> A mental survey of the squares on the chessboard enables the preacher to remember the edifying stories included in his preaching.

Yet, how is it possible to analyze the use of these mnemotechnics in *Les Eschés amoureux* and in *Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, which were not intended as sermons?

<sup>28</sup> "Comment la Riche Precieuse, Verite la royne, (. . .) demostre au jeune Moyse un trop riche petit eschequier quarre, garny de pierres precieuses, et lui devise son mistere. Et puis, par grant auctorite, le pent au col du dit jeune Moyse (. . .)" [How the Riche Précieuse, Vérité the queen, (. . .) shows young Moses a very precious little square chessboard, full of precious stones and talks about its mystery. Then, with great authority, she ties it around his neck (. . .)], Philippe de Mézières, *Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, II, 477 (see note 7).

<sup>29</sup> Philippe de Mézières, *Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, II, 478 (see note 7).

<sup>30</sup> In order to enhance the king's necessary chastity, Jacques de Cessoles relates an anecdote from Valerius Maximus: as Scipio Africanus had conquered Carthage, he refused a maiden whom was introduced to him "pour son soulaz" [for his pleasure], because she was already engaged to a Carthaginian man. This young man, in front of this generosity, "torna le cuer des siens en l'amour et l'alliance des Romains" [made his people love and ally with the Romans], Jacques de Cessoles, *Le Jeu des eschaz moralisé*, 5 (see note 3).



All three works, however different from one another, stage, in the course of their narrative, an educational situation, which emphasizes their didactic ambition. In Philippe de Mézières's work, all speeches are addressed to young Moses, just as the didactic speeches are addressed to the narrator in *Les Eschés amoureux*. The device is not similar in Jacques de Cessoles's treatise, yet the story of the origins of the game is related both in the first book and in the epilogue: the author tells the legend of Philometor, the philosopher who invented chess to improve Evilmedorag, a Babylonian tyrant. The philosopher supposedly taught the king the rules of the game, reflecting an idealized vision of governance. A pupil figure and one (or more) master figure(s) are central in the three works. This *mise en abyme* of the learning situation underlines the importance of the receiver.

In Philippe de Mézières's work, Queen Vérité, in order to educate Moses, writes her commandments on the "*deux tables du coeur du roi*," which are *Entendement* and *Mémoire* (Reason and Memory).<sup>31</sup> This allegorical figure is indeed intended to influence the King's memory. From this perspective, the diagram in *Les Eschés Amoureux* should help the reader or the listener memorize the allegories and the art of love they define. The chessboard model organizes the speech so that it is more easily remembered. A technique, which in the first place is intended to help the speaker memorize, is used to have the audience remember what has been said.<sup>32</sup> The chess grid may be considered as a mnemonic tool both from the production side—the preacher Jacques de Cessoles memorizing his sermon, the authors Evrart de Conty and Philippe de Mézières probably influenced by these means to organize thoughts—and from the reception side—the audience targeted by the preaching or the teaching.

The use of a game board implies an active participation from the targeted audience. This was the case for *Les Eschés amoureux*, as a tutor was needed for a good comprehension of the text. The Venice manuscript shows marginal glosses in Latin; they notably cast light on the meaning of the chess game, as they link a courteous allegory to each symbol adorning the pieces. Yet, in the second available manuscript, the text is not enhanced by any comment and the symbols aren't related to any allegory.<sup>33</sup> According to Bruno Roy and Françoise Guichard-Tesson, editors of the *Livre des eschez amoureux moralisés*, the poem

<sup>31</sup> "'Ma dame,' dist le jeune Moyse, 'mes tables sont en mon cuer, dures comme une pierre, et m'ont este transmises d'une grant montaigne, dont la pierre fu taillie, selon le dit de Daniel le prophete, sans mains, sans fer, et sans martel. L'une de mes tables est appelle entendement et l'autre memoyre'" [Madam, said young Moses, my tables are in my heart, hard as a stone; they were given to me from a mountain, the stone of which was carved, as the prophet Daniel says, without hand, without iron and without a hammer. One of my tables is called reason and the other memory], Philippe de Mézières, *Le Songe du vieil pelerin*, II, 129 (see note 7).

<sup>32</sup> Lorenzo, "The Collection Form," 207 (see note 3).

<sup>33</sup> Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Oc. 66.

must have been part of an oral teaching process intended for a student, while a tutor would comment on the text.<sup>34</sup> Latin marginal glosses would be the sequel to this didactic performance. When the reading reached the chess game episode in the text, the tutor probably moved pieces on a real chessboard, otherwise the game would have made no sense. The pupil had to memorize the images on each piece and the allegories they were related to. The reader's involvement in the memorizing process is necessary: the invention process needs to be reenacted in order to understand the meaning of the text. The reader of *Les Eschés amoureux* somehow needs to cooperate with the author and to replay the game so as to reach the meaning of the poem. At a time when the practice of individual and silent reading is spreading and favors a possible discontinuous approach to the text, the grid however forces a linear approach and consequently affects the time allotted to the reading or listening of the text.<sup>35</sup>

This same strategy seems to apply to *Le Songe du vieil pelerin* by Philippe de Mézières. When Moses is offered a miniature chessboard, and Queen Vérité has just enumerated a long series of sixty-four political and moral developments, the reduplication effect induced by the reappearance of the grid is a hint to the reader to remember all sixty-four virtues and manners of the good prince. The reader has to achieve a task the author has left aside, since the virtues are not precisely linked to the precious stones in the text produced by Philippe de Mézières. The reader's memory is thus called upon.<sup>36</sup>

In these texts, the chess grid fulfills a memorial function. It acts as a testimony of a means to organize fictional or didactic matter, settling what needs to be remembered by the reader. The authors also make the most of the dynamic aspects of the game and lead the reader or listener into initiating the memorial process.<sup>37</sup> The use of a game board for didactic purposes points to the evolution mentalities witnessed at the time.<sup>38</sup> By the beginning of the sixteenth

<sup>34</sup> See Guichard-Tesson and Roy, *Le Livre des eschez amoureux moralisés*, LXII (see note 5).

<sup>35</sup> I am inspired here by Fabienne Pomel's statements on the two versions of *Le Pèlerinage de vie humaine* by Guillaume de Digulleville and their relationship to memory. See her "Mémoire, mnémotechnie et récit de voyage allégorique," ed. Frank Willaert, Herman Braet, Thom Mertens and Theo Venckeleer, *Medieval Memory: Image and Text*. Textes et études du Moyen Age, 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 96.

<sup>36</sup> Anne-Marie Legaré underlines this reader's necessary involvement in the memorization process, analyzing the gaps between the miniatures and the text of a manuscript from Marguerite d'Autriche's library. According to her, the artist "laisse ouverte la possibilité au spectateur de projeter lui-même sur le canevas de l'image le détail des informations recueillies dans le texte," Anne-Marie Legaré, "Allégorie et arts de mémoire: un manuscrit enluminé de la librairie de Marguerite d'Autriche" *Bulletin du bibliophile* 2 (1990): 314–44; here 339.

<sup>37</sup> See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 253 (see note 1).

<sup>38</sup> Concerning this matter, see Lina Bolzoni, *La Stanza della memoria. Modelli letterari e iconografici nell'età della stampa*. Saggi (Einaudi), 797 (Torino: Einaudi, 1995), 87–134.

century, the Franciscan monk Thomas Murner had devised teaching methods that relied on play and memory: his *Chartiludium Institute summarie* was actually a set of cards he invented to ease the learning of Justinian's *Institutions*.<sup>39</sup> Here, the game is genuinely distinctive of the "ludic growth" that prevailed by the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance era.<sup>40</sup> As in the texts written by Jacques de Cessoles, Evrart de Conty and Philippe de Mézières, it is meant as an educational tool.

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<sup>39</sup> See Massimiliano Rossi, "Arte della memoria e codici letterari nei giochi didattici dall'Umanesimo a Comenio," Lina Bolzoni et Pietro Corsi (a cura di), *La Cultura della memoria. Temi e discussione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), 139–67.

<sup>40</sup> Jean-Michel Mehl, *Les Jeux au royaume de France, du XIII<sup>e</sup> au début du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Nouvelles études historiques (Paris: Fayard, 1990), 458.



## Chapter 9

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### Changing the Rules in and of Medieval Chess Allegories

At the end of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, our intrepid, young heroes—Harry, Ron, and Hermione—must survive a series of trials in order stop the dread dark lord Voldemort from stealing the stone that grants eternal life. One such test obliges them to participate in a life-sized game of wizards' chess, which differs from regular, "Muggle" chess in that pieces are not merely captured; rather, they are smashed to bits. Ron, Harry Potter's loyal friend and the best chess player of the three, assumes the role of the knight and coordinates the attack. Harry takes up position as a bishop and Hermione becomes the queen's side castle or rook. In a bold and courageous move late in the game, Ron sacrifices himself so that Harry can checkmate the enemy king and move on to face Voldemort. The symbolism of the chess game is obvious to even the most casual of modern chess players. Ron's sacrifice is something that chess players carry out blithely when playing with wooden pieces, but here it exemplifies the courage that every knight should embody. Harry triumphs in match's endgame and proceeds to foil the villain's evil plot.

While examples of chess heuristics abound in 20<sup>th</sup>-century cinema—Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* and Steven Zaillian's *Searching for Bobby Fisher* leap to mind—it was perhaps during the Middle Ages that chess allegory, in the sense of both extended metaphor and a narrative in which abstract ideas become personified, reached the apex of popularity.<sup>1</sup> Chess proved ubiquitous

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<sup>1</sup> For a very thorough bibliographical treatment of allegory in the Middle Ages, the reader is directed to Bettina Full's entry on "Allegory" in Albrecht Classen, ed. *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms—Methods—Trends*. 3 Volumes. Berlin, New York (De Gruyter) 2010. 1430–1440.

in medieval texts, manuscript illuminations, and murals. However, while chess provided a convenient metaphor for war, politics, and love in the Middle Ages, today's rules were not codified until the late fifteenth century, and people played chess according every-evolving, local rules.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, modern readers of medieval chess allegories should be mindful of the state of the game at the time of the text's composition if they wish to fully understand the game's significance in that work.

In very early chess, many pieces moved one square at a time, thereby endowing the early game with a structure akin to parataxis:<sup>3</sup> one move followed another in a succession of moves, but combinations were far harder to accomplish because of the relative lack of mobility of most chess pieces.<sup>4</sup> As time wore on, pieces began to move with more fluidity: by the thirteenth century, in the Lombard game, for instance, the first move of the king could be to a third or more distant square and the pawn could move two squares on its first move, as in modern chess.<sup>5</sup> In the French and English game of roughly the same time, the pawn acquired its power to capture *en passant*, where a pawn tries to move two squares past another pawn, but the latter pawn has the choice to capture the pawn rushing past.<sup>6</sup> By the time the modern rules of chess came about, the game acquired a hypotactic structure whereby the moves of certain pieces became clearly subordinate to others: the queen took on her modern

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The most recent and detailed work to date on the subject is Copeland, Rita and Peter T. Struck, *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*. Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> The standard history of chess remains H. J. R., Murray's *A History of Chess* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913). Subsequent histories include Richard Eales, *Chess: The History of a Game* (New York and Oxford: Facts of File, 1985) and David Shenk, *The Immortal Game: A History of Chess* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Parataxis refers to the literary technique of juxtaposing simple clauses and sentences with the minimum use of coordinating and subordinate conjunctions. Its opposite, hypotaxis, refers to the complex subordination of unequal clauses and phrases in a longer, more sophisticated sentence structure. Comparisons between chess and language go back at least as far as Ferdinand de Saussure who compared the conventional nature of linguistic reference to the rules of chess (*Cours de linguistique générale*. Etudes et documents Payot [Paris: Payot, 1969], 125–27). John R. Searle brings the chess/language metaphor into his theory of speech acts: chess is akin to *langue*, and a chess game, an example of *parole*, what Searle would call a speech act (*Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge University Press, 1969, 39–40). Building upon these insights, I would argue that chess has a grammar whose morphology is grounded in the possible moves accorded to various pieces and a syntax in possible sequencing of those moves. For example, though a bishop may move diagonally, it cannot do so if another of its pieces is in the way. The latter piece must move first and then the bishop can move there.

<sup>4</sup> In *A History of Chess*, Murray provides a useful overview of the earliest medieval rules in his chapter, "The Mediaeval Game" (452–95 [see note 2]).

<sup>5</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 461–62 (see note 2).

<sup>6</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 461–62 (see note 2).

function, thereby becoming the most lethal piece on the board, and the bishop was able to reach 32 of the possible 64 squares, whereas before it could only reach 16.<sup>7</sup> The augmented mobility of these pieces allowed far more complicated sequences of moves, allowing chess players and allegorists to achieve a meaningfulness that one could call rhetorical or figurative. For example, when a player pins an opponent's piece, that piece is threatened with capture but cannot move without exposing another piece of higher value. The circumstances of the pin may change to enhance the move's meaning: the pinned piece might be a pawn protecting a bishop, or it might be a rook protecting his king (also called an absolute pin). In the first case, the pinned piece may move, although the exposed piece may be captured; however, in the latter scenario, it is illegal for the pinned piece to move because it would expose the king. To a medieval audience living within the cultural norms associated with feudalism and kingship, the situation speaks volumes to political notions of duty and honor.

How did chess allegories function before the game acquired this level of sophistication? In this study, I will chart how chess allegories evolved from a time when the game was very young through the heyday of medieval chess allegory and finally to the first extant poem to utilizing the (more-or-less) modern rules. A slippage occurs progressively over time in how chess functions as a vehicle for poetic and didactic meaning, precisely because, I would posit, when the game was insufficiently known to audiences, poets could rely only on a superficial understanding of the game or guide their readers along laboriously through gloss or commentary. In these early years, then, chess allegories remained static or textually cumbersome. However, as the game's rules gained widespread recognition, poets could dispense with tedious explanations and create dynamic allegories capable of conveying meaning more subtly and economically. For obvious reasons, the present treatment cannot be exhaustive, and we will restrict our study to texts in which chess functions as a master trope and leave aside texts in which chess appears only in an allusion or small, discrete scene. We will, however, draw upon texts from several cultural and linguistic traditions: Persian, Latin, French, and Catalan. The Persian text—one of the earliest chess texts known to us—recounts a story in which chess is passed on from India to Persia and then how the Persians' bested its neighbors in their understanding of the game. At that point, we will move to a brief consideration of Jacobus de Cessolis' *Liber de moribus hominum vel officiis nobelium sive super ludo scacchorum*, arguably the most important chess allegory of the Middle Ages. From

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<sup>7</sup> For a technical analysis of how bishops moved in early chess and how the queen might have acquired her modern movement, see the essay by Mark N. Taylor in this volume. Marilyn Yalom provides an overview of the queen in chess history in her *Birth of the Chess Queen: A History* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004).

there, we will comment on the *Eschéz d'Amours*, a long verse narrative of the French tradition that was glossed in an equally compendious volume, also in French, by Evrart de Conty.<sup>8</sup> Finally, we will conclude our study with the *Schachs d'Amor*, a lyrico-narrative poem in Catalan from the late fifteenth century which constitutes the earliest record of a game played by the modern rules. From this longitudinal study, we will see how as the modern game of chess emerges, the rules of chess allegory shift away from explicit explanation of the allegory to an implicit understanding of it. In other words, instead of having to draw meaning out for the reader, the reader is able to draw it out for himself.<sup>9</sup>

### Static Chess Allegories: "The Explanation of Chatrang" and Jacobus' *Liber*

In the year 691, a chess text was written down in Pahlavi, a language of early Persia, entitled the "Vijârishn I Chatrang" or "The explanation of Chatrang."<sup>10</sup> The text relates a legend of chess's origins and how it purportedly passed from the ancient cultures of India to Persia. The text is short and formulaic in many respects, but its early date and explicit link between chess and national or ethnic pride makes it an apt starting point for a study of chess and medieval culture.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This work has heretofore been referred to as the *Eschés amoureux* in modern scholarship. Gregory Heyworth and I are finishing the first complete edition on this long poem in two volumes with Brill publishers. The reason for the title change is based on historical bibliographical evidence and internal thematics. A copy of this poem is believed to have figured in the library of Charles V: the library's catalog refers to a long poem entitled *Les Echés d'Amour*. Moreover, in the poem, the *acteur* loses his chess game against the lady and goes on to meet Pallas, who explains to him that the sensual life that Venus recommends ill suits a wise man. Thus, the story is about the chess *and* failure of love: the *échec d'Amour*.

<sup>9</sup> For a study of another text along similar lines of argumentation, see Kristin Juel's "Defeating the Devil at Chess: A Struggle between Virtue and Vice in *Le Jeu des Esches de la dame moralisé*" in this volume.

<sup>10</sup> The text is also called by some the *Chatrang-nāman*. I reference the translation done by J. C. Tarapore, who publishes it in *Vijarishn I Chatrang or The Explanation of Chatrang and other texts* together with a transliteration of the original Pahlavi and a translation into both English and Gujarati (Bombay: The Trustees of the Parsee Punchayet Funds and Properties, 1932). Murray also includes a version in English (*A History of Chess*, 151–53 [see note 2]), though his version is based upon an earlier German translation published by C. Salemann in *Mélanges asiatiques tirés du Bulletin de l'Académie Impériale de St.-Petersbourg*, IX, iii. (1887), 220–30.

<sup>11</sup> Murray shows little appreciation for the text's literary qualities: "The literary construction of the *Chatrang-nāmak* is crude and conventional. The parallelism of the incidents, the embassies, their riddles, the attempts at solution, the amazing success of the one party and the utter failure of the other, all betray the want of experience and skill of the early explorers in the field of fiction" (*A History of Chess*, 153 [see note 2]).



The great Indian king, Dîvsâram, sends a chessboard and tribute to Takhrîtûs, the Persian king, and issues a challenge to him through his *vizir* or adviser: "As your name is the King of Kings, all your emperorship over us connotes that your wise men should be wiser than ours. Either you send us an explanation of this game of chess or send revenue and tribute to us" (12). The king asks for four days to consider the puzzle. The king's *vizir*, the clever Vazôrgmitrô, solves the puzzle but waits until the fourth day to reveal the solution:

Next day [sic] Vazôrgmitrô called Takhrîtûs before him and said, "Dîvsâram made this game of chess like war. [10] He made the two generals like the Kings (who are) essential for the left and the right, the *farzin* to resemble the chief of the warriors, the elephant to resemble the chieftain protecting the rear, the knight to resemble the chief of the horsemen, (and) the pawns to resemble the foot-soldiers who lead in battle." [11] After this Takhrîtûs arranged the game of chess and played with Vazôrgmitrô and Vazôrgmitrô thrice defeated Takhrîtûs and thereby great joy prevailed in the whole country.<sup>12</sup>

Not content, however, with having divined the nature of chess, Vazôrgmitrô sends his own game puzzle to the Indian king, one that resembles a precursor of backgammon (*nard*) where the pieces move circularly:

I shall make the movements and the progress in a circle of the pieces to resemble the movements of men in this world whose intelligence is connected to spiritual (powers), and who turn and pass on under the influence of the seven (planets) and the twelve (signs of the Zodiac), and when possible they smite and overcome one another just as men in this world smite one another. [31] And when during the progress of this revolution all the pieces are overcome, they shall be like the men who pass away from this earth, and when they are rearranged they resemble men who become revived at the time of the resurrection.<sup>13</sup>

The Indian King's wise men are unable to figure out the game, thereby earning the Iranians wealth, prestige, and admiration. The Iranian king's title of King of Kings is deemed worthy of him.

The illocutionary force of these games as metaphors, and that of chess in particular, stems not from knowledge of the game's rules or through the three games that the king and advisor play. Indeed, the author says nothing about those specific games, not because they serve no purpose—clearly, we are meant to understand only that the advisor is a skilled player—but at this early time in the game's history, the rules are not sufficiently known to make a game something understandable to many readers. In order to derive its most universal appeal, the author can only compare how the game in its initial

<sup>12</sup> Tarapore, *Vijarishn I Chatrang*, 12 (see note 10). The numbers in square brackets denote internal text divisions in the original text.

<sup>13</sup> Tarapore, *Vijarishn I Chatrang*, 13 (see note 10).

set-up resembles static, systematic microcosms of observable human behavior, i.e., war. The relative importance of one piece over another remains implicit and grounded not in the rules of the game, but through the audience's common experience: for example, chieftains are more important than foot soldiers. The game represents more of a pretext to the overt political propagandistic message of the text. As Murray has it:

It is obvious here that we have here a literary work, not a simple record of historical fact. The intention of the narrative lies upon the surface, the exalting of the wisdom and fame of the Persian race at the expense of a neighboring people.<sup>14</sup>

It is only through an explicit mimetic link between the world off the board and the game on the board can chess function in any meaningful way. However, its significance beyond that one, explicit level of meaning remains elusive.

Chess arrived in Europe around 1000 A.D., after which time it quickly gained importance as social and political symbol.<sup>15</sup> It is Tristan's gracefulness in playing chess, for example, that sways a band of merchants into kidnapping him.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Tristan and Isolde, the Middle Ages' star-crossed lovers, are shown playing chess in the plastic arts.<sup>17</sup> Chrétien de Troyes tells how Gauvain was interrupted when exchanging tender kisses with a maiden by an angry mob of townspeople. Without a shield to defend himself, Gauvain ties a chessboard to his arm and the maiden throws chess pieces at those attacking them.<sup>18</sup> Gautier de Coinci, credited with popularizing songs to the Virgin Mary in Old French, referred to Mary several times as the queen of heaven, using both the ordinary word "reine" as well as the chess term "fierge."<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, in none of these texts is a game narrated in detail. Chess is used only as a

<sup>14</sup> Murray, *A History of Chess*, 153 (see note 2).

<sup>15</sup> One of the earliest chess texts in Europe is dated to 997, the *Versus de scacchi* (also known as the *Einsiedeln Verses* since the manuscript was discovered in Einsiedeln, Switzerland). The text only describes how the pieces move. It is not allegorical in nature, but constitutes nonetheless an important monument of European chess literature since it echews Arabic terminology in favor of more European names for the pieces. See H. M. Gamer, "The Earliest Evidence of Chess in Western Literature: The Einsiedeln Verses" *Speculum* 29 (1954), 734–750.

<sup>16</sup> The most detailed account of scene with the merchants is recounted in the Scandinavian saga. An edition in French translation has been provided in Daniel Lacroix and Philippe Walter, *Tristan et Iseut: Les poèmes français; La saga norroise*. Lettres gothiques (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1989), 495–664; here 529–30.

<sup>17</sup> For a typical image of Tristan and Isolde playing chess, here a mirror case from the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, see <http://www.davidrumsey.com/amica/amico959999-34269.html> (last accessed March 15, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Conte del graal*, ed. Charles Méla. Classiques Modernes (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1994), vv. 5814–24 and 5926–32.

<sup>19</sup> See Daniel E. O'Sullivan, *Marian Devotion in Thirteenth-Century French Lyric* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 14–15; Steven M. Taylor, "God's Queen: Chess Imagery in the Poetry of Gautier de Coinci," *Fifteenth Century Studies* 17 (1990), 403–19; and Yalom, *Birth of the Chess Queen* (see note 7).

discreet metaphor within a wider context wholly unconcerned with the game itself.

Chess allegories, nonetheless, continued to be written, and early, static medieval chess allegory would find its culmination in Jacobus de Cessolis' *Liber Liber de moribus hominum vel officiis nobilium sive super ludo scachorum* (hereafter, the *Liber*), composed in Italy around 1300.<sup>20</sup> In this master allegory, each piece on the board represents a member of an idealized medieval society. Obviously, the king and queen hold an important place, and Jacobus gives them their due, but he also goes into intricate detail concerning the role of other pieces, including the pawns to each of which he assigns a productive role in medieval society: farmers, smiths, clothmakers, money changers, doctors, innkeepers, gatekeepers of the town, and messengers. The Persian text may be far shorter and less sophisticated, but it and Jacobus' text both employ the same strategy derived through empirical observation and comparison between life on with life off the board to make their point. Jacobus focuses on only one side of the board to show how the hierarchical relationship among the pieces on the board are like a fixed social hierarchy: merchants and innkeepers hold less political clout than knights or bishops, thus they retain less significance on the chessboard.

Jacobus provides detailed instructions on how the pieces move in his region at the time as in other early European texts on chess, but significantly, a game is never played out in his narrative. Jacobus explains the movement of pieces,

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<sup>20</sup> This early literature included what Murray referred to as *The Winchester Poem*; chapter 184, *De scaccis*, in the *De Naturis Rerum* by Alexander Neckam; the *Elegia de ludo scachorum*; the *Deventer Poem*; the *Corpus Poem*; and a digression upon games contained in *Vetula*, believed to have been composed by Richard de Fournival. See Murray, *A History of Chess*, 496–528 (see note 2), for an introduction to and summary of these texts as well as an appendix of the original Latin works. All of these poems are primarily concerned with outlining the rules for the game, or at least, the game as the authors understood it with varying success at arriving at clarity.

See Sonja Musser Golladay's essay in this volume for a study of another important chess text from this time: Alfonso el Sabio's *Libro del acedrex*.

The *Liber* knew great fame even in its day. It was translated into several vernaculars—German, French (on two separate occasions), Italian, Spanish, Catalan, Dutch, Swedish, and Czech—and has been the subject of much study. See Burt, Marie Anita, "Jacobus de Cessolis: *Libellus de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium ac popularium super ludo scachorum*," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Austin, 1957, xxix–xxxvii; Murray, *A History of Chess*, 545–50 (see note 2); Jenny Adams, *Power Play. The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Middle Ages*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 15–56. Olle Ferm and Volker Honemann edited the acts from a symposium on chess in which the *Liber* took pride of place: *Chess and Allegory in the Middle Ages*. Scripta minora, 12. Stockholm: Runica et Mediaevalia, 2005.

For an interesting comparison to another static chess allegory, *Le Songe du vieil pelerin* by Philippe de Mézières, see Amandine Mussou's contribution to this volume: "Playing with Memory: The Chessboard as a Mnemonic Tool in Medieval Didactic Literature."

especially their potential opening moves, as cogs in a giant social wheel, but he never suggests how these moves might move in a coordinated effort.<sup>21</sup> Their relative importance is explicitly linked in ways that were implicit in the *Chatrang*: the most important pieces stand around the king in back center of the board and the chief of warriors or *farzin*, who would eventually become the queen in later permutations of the game, stands right next to the king where s/he is in an ideal place from which she can perform her primary duty of protecting the king from attack.<sup>22</sup> The king's power is therefore somewhat paradoxically derived through his lack of participation, his detachment from the battlefield. Jenny Adams reads Jacobus' description of the movements of the pieces as an indirect reference to the inherent violent nature of the Jacobus' society:

Although explaining the rules, Jacobus never describes a game in action; the board and its pieces remain static, a frozen grid of figures with lists of virtues attached to each. When played, however, chess was (and is) a game of war that necessarily results in a king's figurative death. By explaining the pieces' various moves in his final chapter, Jacobus opens the door to the symbolic violence implied by this conflict.<sup>23</sup>

The key word here is "implied": Jacobus' text implies that these pieces can move in a coordinated way but stops short of demonstrating how they work in actual combat. It may very well be out of a kind of decorous distaste for actual violence that no battle is depicted, but perhaps Jacobus' also insists on static relationships out of a desire to see social hierarchy as immutable. He belonged, after all, to the ranks of the clergy in a highly ordered society. He held a place of social privilege, and why would he want to intimate that the situation could be at all fluid?

Ultimately, however, a fundamental reason for the early focus on static relationships must be largely due to the fact that during most the Middle Ages, the rules of chess were in flux. From the time of the Persian text's composition to the time when Jacobus penned his *Liber*, people played the game according to cultural, geographic or even personal preferences. After all, in these early days, not only did different regions adhere to different sets of rules or *assizes* which meant that a traveling chess player would have to quickly adapt to a region's or individual's style of play, but chess was often played with dice, and stakes were frequently placed, though clerical sources frowned upon such additions. How could these early authors expect all of their readers to understand how they

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<sup>21</sup> Adams suggests that Jacobus' allegory marks as significant shift in the way medieval people conceived the body politic. Earlier metaphors focused on the state as a body where the king was the head and his subjects the rest of the body, but Jacobus' chess metaphor endows everyone with his own body, though they remain bound in a system of external political rules (*Power Play*, 19–20, 26–47 [see note 20]).

<sup>22</sup> It is worth recalling that it was the king of Persia's *vizir* that solved the chess problem in the first place.

<sup>23</sup> Adams, *Power Play*, 20 (see note 20).

played the game? They simply couldn't; the authors of the *Chatrang* or the *Liber* were writing in the interest of national pride and social stability. They could not take a chance that all readers agreed with how they played the game and so they stayed on the level of surface comparisons.

### Playing Games with Chess and Allegory: *Les Eschéz d'Amours*

In the decades immediately before and following Jacobus' death, many players experimented with the rules of chess, and poets of medieval allegories began to move beyond static relationships among the pieces and lead their readers through the moves of a specific game.<sup>24</sup> However, since a lack of consensus about the rules remained during the composition of these texts, authors could rely on readers' knowing only the most basic of rules. Beyond that, more context was needed to make dynamic chess allegories understood, and poets could employ one or more of a number of strategies. Of course, one could provide explicit descriptions of placement or moves and guide a reader through the game step by step, but this burdens textual economy. In order to quicken comprehension, poets could draw on symbolism that resonates both on and off the chessboard: white vs. dark pieces, forward vs. retreating movements, etc. This fusion of specific chess symbolism with larger cultural ideas helps a poet economically convey ideas rather than include a chess tutorial in the midst of his poem. Finally, poets might extend Jacobus' allegorical style by assigning abstract, allegorical values to the pieces as the authors do with various actants in works like the *Roman de la Rose*. Here we move away from the idea of allegory as extended metaphor, i.e., chess *looks* like war, and toward what one might call, "pure allegory" where abstract ideas become personified as sensible agents. The poet of the *Eschéz d'Amours*, a very famous chess love poem, relies on all three of these devices—common knowledge of rudimentary chess rules, language and symbolism that resonates both on and off the chessboard, and pure allegory—in order to articulate a message about the dubious nature of unbridled romantic love.<sup>25</sup>

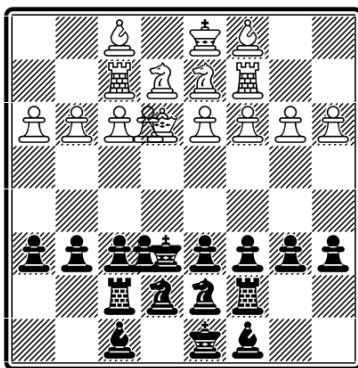
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<sup>24</sup> As Eales puts it, "As far as the rules of the game were concerned, there is rather more evidence of pressures for change in the West, though still no sign as late as 1450 of an imminent upheaval in the laws of play. Before 1200 alterations to the Moslem game seem to have been confined to external appearances: the black and white checkered board, which is mentioned as early as the 'Einsiedeln Verses', and the representational designs of the pieces. After 1200 pressures to speed up the game seem to have become stronger, and this led to a variety of experiments and local rules which diverged from each in various ways" (*Chess: The History*, 69 [see note 2]).

<sup>25</sup> The poem is well-known despite its bizarre editorial history. The longest of the two manuscripts, Dreden Oc. 66, has never been completely edited. In the early 20th century,

Certain basic rules of chess never changed: two sides move in turns, and, perhaps most importantly, only one piece occupies each square. The *Eschéz* poet explicitly relies on knowledge of the first rule to give pace to his story: the *acteur* moves, the beloved reacts and countermoves, etc. However, he breaks the second fundamental rule. Before the game begins, the poet describes the placement of pieces of each side of the board. Figure 1 shows each piece's position:

The Lady's Pieces



The Acteur's Pieces

Figure 1: The placement of pieces in the *Eschéz d'Amours*

The traditional spot for the queen, that is, next to the king is vacant at the start of the game, and she occupies a different square. Although unconventional, there was nothing *a priori* wrong with putting the queen on a different square in medieval chess: experimentation with different positions was common at that time and even putting her on the front lines, though ludicrous, was theoretically possible. However, she co-occupies a space with a pawn, which breaks that fundamental rule of the game where one piece occupies each square. Could it be that our chess allegorist was ignorant of the most basic rules of chess?

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Stanley Gaplin of Trinity College (Connecticut) traveled to Dresden and published a long summary of the poem before, presumably, undertaking an edition. See Stanley L. Galpin, "*Les Eschez Amoureux: A Complete Synopsis, with Unpublished Extracts,*" *The Romanic Review* 9 (1920): 293–307. Unfortunately, Professor Galpin died in an accident before he could do his edition, and Trinity College does not have his papers. Then, before another scholar could take up the task, the manuscript was severely damaged during the fire-bombing of the city in 1945. It survives in some incomplete editions, and a few photos of the chess portion taken before the war and housed at the Cleveland Public Library show us the work in its pristine state before it met its fate. The present author and Gregory Heyworth are currently finishing a complete edition.

I would suggest that the co-occupation is neither an error nor evidence of a new variation.<sup>26</sup> The gesture should be read as a rhetorical trope in chess language, one that suggests cultural anxieties. For one, the image suggests adultery: two people illicitly occupy the same square space, that is, a bedroom or even a bed. This, in turn, breaks not only a fundamental rule of chess but also of a foundational institution of Western society: monogamous marriage. This anxiety becomes exacerbated by the social chasm that exists between the two pieces in the universe of chess: the queen is sleeping with a pawn, that is, a foot soldier. Medieval literature may be replete with examples of queens sleeping with valiant knights like Lancelot or Tristan, but not with foot soldiers. If we overlay the social functions assigned to each piece in the tradition of Jacobus' allegory, the image becomes even more salacious: for Jacobus, pawns represent peasants, smiths, lawyers, merchants, physicians, inn keepers, guards, and even street performers.

The four pieces on these two squares, besides evoking cultural anxieties through their static placement at the outset of the game, also play a pivotal role once the game has begun. The game opens with each player advancing pawns in such a way that each player may capture each other's queen/pawn coupling. The lady hardly hesitates to capture the *acteur's* pieces, but because the *acteur's* goal is to make real in life what is virtual on the board, he declines to trade even when this strategy would keep him in the game:

Or cuiday je pareillement  
 Reprendre sa fierge ensemment,  
 Ainsy que je vous ay ja dit,  
 Mais je m'arrestay un petit.  
 Si me suy adont percheüs  
 Que j'avoye esté decheüs  
 Et que trop eüssse mespris  
 Se j'eüssse sa fierge pris,  
 Car elle peuist, sans mesprendre,  
 Un de mes rocz pour neant prendre. (vv. 5307–16)<sup>27</sup>

[Now I also thought that I would take her queen in the same way, just as I had told you, but I hesitated for a moment. I noticed that I had been wrong and that I would be mistaken if I took her queen, since she could, without fail, take one of my rooks for nothing.]

<sup>26</sup> Murray suggests that the *Eschéz* offers a variant of the game as it was played in a given time or place in *A History of Chess*, 478 (see note 2). Eales concurs, though he provides no additional evidence or argument, so he may be simply repeating Murray's opinion (*Chess: The History*, 69 [see note 2]).

<sup>27</sup> I take all references from the edition upon which Gregory Heyworth and I are currently working. All translations are my own.

The *acteur's* reasoning is obviously flawed. While another piece could take his rook—thus the idea of taking it “for nothing”—not following through on the exchange means a serious strategic error. The *acteur's* faulty thinking goes to the poet's point that men should follow the way of reason, not sensuality, in life. He decides to protect his rook and captures the lady's other pawn. As a result, the lady takes an early advantage over her opponent, and he loses almost all of his other pieces, a humiliating sequence that the poet spares his readers. He loses the game badly, and the lady is rewarded with a crown of roses while the *acteur* remains completely at a loss to explain what happened.

Besides relying on common knowledge of these fundamental chess rules, the poet employs certain polysemic terms that resonate both on and off the chessboard in order to further enliven his allegory. To cement the thematic nexus of chess, love, and war in the poem, the poet relies on two particular terms: “*traire*” and “*conforter*.” The importance of *traire* is noted from the very beginning as it figures both in the prologue and in the first rubric.<sup>28</sup> Derived from the Latin *tractare* meaning rarely to maul but more commonly to handle, to treat, or to deal with a person, the Old French verb *traire* is semantically rich. The players “*traient*” or “handle” their pieces, thus the common Latin meaning comes through, but Godefroy lists over twenty other meanings including generically “to draw” and more specifically “to fire (a projectile),” “to transpose or translate,” and “to possess.”<sup>29</sup> The *acteur* discovers in the midst of the game that he cannot match the Lady's ability to “*traire*”: he cannot satisfactorily handle his armies as well as her or engage in battle—i.e., “*traire*” in the sense of firing weapons—and so, finally, he fails to “*traire*” or possess his lady.

Besides “*traire*,” other terms that overlap love and war are utilized, especially the term “*conforter*.” The word is derived from the Latin *confortare*, meaning primarily is “to reinforce” an army. From that primary meaning the metaphorical meanings of “to encourage” and then “to console” arose. Going hand in hand with the ability to “*traire*” is that of “*conforter*” as one passage, taken from among many others, demonstrates:

28

Je fuy au jeu, n'a pas granment,  
D'une fierge en l'angle matéz  
Par les *trais*—tant fuy pres hastéz—  
De celle qui, au voir retraire,  
Si gracieusement scet *traire*  
Au jeu que je dy des eschés,  
C'onques tant n'en sot Ulixés.

(vv. 10–16, emphasis added)

[I was, not too long ago, mated by a queen in the corner through the moves—I was quickly dispatched—by the one lady who, if truth be told, knows how to play this game of chess so well that even Ulysses never knew as much.]

29 Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*. Volume 8. Paris: F. Vieweg, 1895, 1–4.



Nient mains je ne reculay pas,  
 Ains voy lor *traire* et me *conforte*  
 Du päonnet, qui le clef porte. (vv. 5320–22)

[Nevertheless I did not retreat, rather I proceeded to move and reinforce myself with the pawn carrying the key.]

Unable to “traire” or “conforter” well, the *acteur* fails to find “confort” or comfort. If real chess is played on the double axes of rank and file, this literary game plays out along the two axes of “traire” and “conforter,” all of which gets translated or transposed—yet another meaning of “traire”—through the process of allegory and related to us in textual form: the narrator often tells us that he wishes to “traire” his tale. Moreover, while both players seek, to use an expression from the poem, “conforter cuer et corps,” but the meaning of that statement depends upon the player in question. The woman wishes to “conforter” in the martial sense: she wishes to shore up protection for her own heart and body by rebuffing the *acteur*. The man wishes to “conforter” his own heart and body by seducing the young woman, by “comforting” his own body through carnal knowledge of hers. However, she proves far more skillful than he originally anticipated.

Chess language in the *Eschéz* encompasses all of these meanings as the game is played out *trait par trait*, move by move, and each move constitutes another element of the chess speech act. When put into sequence, they articulate a narrative about the nature of licit and illicit love, using chess parlance that had become common in the chess community. However, as often as that may be the case, it is just as often true that symbolism and ideas from outside the narrative itself are introduced to make the message of that poem more readily comprehensible to the reader. For example, the poet relies on symbolism of left and right as well to add the finishing touches to his tale. While the narrator spares the long, humiliating sequence of moves that virtually strip him of his army, he does relate the ending of the game. The lady mates him with her queen and a pawn, the very pieces that he neglected to take earlier in the game. Of course, the word “mater” also has different connotations: to mate, to vanquish (one thinks especially of modern Spanish, *matar*, to kill). In addition to using these particular pieces to undo the poem’s narrator, the lady mates him in the left corner—*l’angle senestre*—of the board: being mated in the corner is the most prestigious—and conversely for the opponent, the most humbling—way to end the game; second of all, being mated in the *left* corner, with all of the connotations of “senestre,” proves the *acteur*’s lack of right. This reverberates even more strongly in light of the Venice manuscript’s diagram of the chessboard wherein the woman’s king is called “li drois rois” or “the *right* king.”

## The Lady's pieces

		Franchise [Frankness]		Li drois rois [The Right King]	Pités [Pity]		
		Douls regart [Sweet Looks]	Honte [Shame]	Paour [Fear]	Bel accueil [Fair Welcome]		
Jonesche [Youth]	Biauté [Beauty]	Simpleche [Simplicity]	Maniere/ Doulz sem- blant [Man- nerism/Fair Seeming]	Faiticetés [Disseml- ing]	Sens [Wisdom]	Bontés [Good-ness]	Noblesche [Nobility]
Oyseuse [Idleness]	Regars [Gazing]	Dous Pensers [Sweet Thoughts]	Delis/ Plaisance [Delight/ Pleasure]	Doubte de failir [Fear of Fail- ure]	Souvenir [Memory]	Biau maintien [Tidiness]	Bien celer [Clever Conceal- ment]
		Persever-an che [Persever- ance]	Harde-ment [Boldness]	Dous parler [Sweet Talking]	Pacience [Patience]		
		Espoir [Hope]		Li rois [The King]	Desir [Desire]		

The *acteur's* pieces

Figure 2. Chessboard with Evrart's allegorical values inserted

The third strategy that we listed above by virtue of which chess allegorists might enliven their texts comes down to assigning to each piece an abstract allegorical value (as opposed to Jacobus' motivated correspondences of lesser pieces with lesser citizens and vice versa). In so doing, a poet make take his chess allegory to an entirely different plane, and instead of relying on outside

resemblances, he can fit the chess game even more to his predetermined poetic meaning. On folio 66r of the Venice manuscript, a diagram of the chessboard with inserted allegorical values is extant and reproduced in figure 2.

When we overlay the allegorical values onto the early sequence involving the queen/pawn couplings, a deeper meaning is revealed. The lady opens by advancing her pawn of Beauty two spaces, and the acteur counters with his pawn of Sweet thoughts.<sup>30</sup> She reinforces her first move by naively advancing her pawn of Simplicity, which the acteur counters in symmetrical fashion with his pawn of Gazing. The lady's first of Beauty captures the man's pawn of Sweet Thoughts, thereby threatening the man's queen/pawn of Pleasure/Delight. The acteur counters again symmetrically by capturing Simplicity with Gazing and threatens her queen/pawn of Mannerism/Fair Seeming. She then takes his pawn of Delight and queen of Pleasure—a castration image if there ever was one—and the acteur becomes more concerned with losing his rook of Perseverance. As a result, he falters, commits an error in strategy: he preserves his rook rather than take her queen/pawn pair, and cannot recuperate, for perseverance does him no good now that she sees that he is bent on his own pleasure. From there, he goes on to lose.

While this strategy imbues the players' strange chess behavior with new meaning, we must remember that this level of meaning forms not part of the poem itself; rather, it is derived from Evrart's prose commentary. As Richard Eales observes, the relationship between the allegorical value and the piece, despite varying symbols carried on the shield of each piece, is not always clear:

The poet's first pawn, who represented idleness, carried a shield on which was shown a withered tree, for reasons not altogether clear. It is scarcely surprising that the original verse was soon linked with a prose commentary in which some of the finer points were explained. To a modern reader the whole conception seems forced and unconvincing, and as the poem never gained much popularity it is possible that medieval audiences reacted in the same way. (62)

The truth of these comments notwithstanding, there is nothing unusual in the lack of resemblance between pieces and allegorical value—allegory relies, in fact, on the arbitrary, not motivated, assignment of values to an actant. More importantly, we must correctly divine the relationship between the poem and Evrart's commentary. While it may be tempting to conclude that Evrart must have written the *Eschéz* poem itself, since he would seem to have the "key," it is much more plausible to see in Evrart's text nothing more than an interpretation and extension of the poem.<sup>31</sup> Evrart understood quite simply that the *Eschéz*

<sup>30</sup> Murray provides a helpful table that outlines each move in reference to lines from the poem (*A History of Chess*, 479–82 [see note 2]).

<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, as Heyworth and I detail in our forthcoming edition, other scholars have asserted that Evrart was the author based on the glossing of the Venice manuscript and other

poet wished to show a man relying on senses rather than reason when playing the chess game of courtship, and he obliged by assigning values that clarify that lesson.

When compared to the earlier static chess allegories, the *Chatrang* and *Liber*, the chess allegory in the *Eschéz d'Amours* proves far more dynamic. Like the narrator, the reader can easily get caught up in the movement of the game, and when one keeps in mind the allegorical values that Evrart conjures, the game makes sense as allegory. However, it still makes no sense as chess. The game's symmetrical tit-for-tat opening sequence is devoid of any kind of sound chess strategy. The exchange of the queen and pawn, first initiated by the narrator and accepted by the lady, is aborted for no good reason relating to chess. The abandonment of the exchange makes excellent sense in demonstrating just how unreasonable the game of love can be together with the reliance on chess and poetic language and symbolism. In other words, while we have an individual game played in this text, the game is played from an otherwise unknown starting position, breaks a fundamental chess rule, and is incomplete in its recounting. The chess allegory of the *Eschéz* may be more dynamic than in earlier texts, but the chess portion and its allegorical side fail to mesh.

### Chess and Allegory in Perfect Harmony: The *Scachs d'amor*

When modern rules of the game came into being towards the end of the fifteenth century, life on both real and virtual chessboards would never be the same.<sup>32</sup> From the old hierarchy of static, inherent nobility both on and off the board emerges a new hierarchy based in notions of mobility, which translates into lethality on the board. Pawns still occupy the front lines and retain their earlier function, but one piece in particular took on new, more powerful movements: the queen assumed extensive new powers and could move in each and every direction as far as she would like, provided no one blocked her way.<sup>33</sup> In past systems, bishops could only move three squares diagonally, but they now move diagonally as far as they

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assumptions. See especially Françoise Guichard-Tesson, "Evrart de Conty, poète, traducteur et commentateur," ed. Michèle Goyens and Pieter De Leemans, *Aristotle's Problemata in Different Times and Tongues*. Mediaevalia Lovaniensia, ser. 1, studia 39 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006), 145–175; here 151; and Gianmario Raimondi, "*Les eschés amoureux*: studio preparatorio ed edizione (I. vv. 1–3662)," *Pluteus* 8–9 (1998): 66–251; here 88 and 100, note 55.

<sup>32</sup> It would be a mistake to think that variations no longer persisted across Europe after these rules became accepted in general. However, as Murray explains, the term "chess" came to mean the new game whereas authors began to use terms meaning "old chess" for the former *assizes*. See Murray, *A History of Chess*, 776–810.

<sup>33</sup> For a hypothesis of how the queen may have acquired her new mobility, see the essay by Mark Taylor in this volume.

wish in a given direction as long as no one blocks their path. However, knights maintain a small advantage over bishops: whereas bishops must keep to either black or white and thus can access only thirty-two out of sixty-four squares, knights, by virtue of their flexible three-square movement and ability to jump over pieces, can land on any square on the board. With the progressive spread of these rules all over Europe, chess love allegory could further the engaging tone that characterizes the *Eschéz* poem but in ways that are meaningful as both chess and allegory without external explication or glossing.

The Catalan *Scachs d'amors* emerged out of a chess circle in Valencia between 1470 and 1490, that is, at a time when humanism began to flourish in King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella's Aragón.<sup>34</sup> Composed of sixty-four stanzas to reflect the squares of the chessboard, the game is played between three known personalities of the day: Don Francí de Castellvi assumes the personage of Mars and therefore the side of the suitor; Narcís Vinyoles takes on the role of Venus and thus the side of the lady; Mossen Fenollar becomes Mercury who observes the game.<sup>35</sup> It is the latter personage that makes a running commentary on how the pieces moved at the time in Aragon, and, indeed, the poem has most often been cited as the first record of modern chess. Its position in the tradition of chess love allegory has been, with perhaps one or two exceptions, neglected.<sup>36</sup>

































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<sup>34</sup> The poem's modern editor, Antoni Ferrando Francés, places its composition ca. 1497 and I take all references from that edition: *Narcís Vinyoles i la seua obra*. Monografies i assaigs, 2 (València: Universitat de València, 1978). José Ricardo Gomez Calvo (d. 2002), a Spanish International chess master and chess historian, has written extensively about Valencia and chess during this period of history, and many of his writings are accessible online in .pdf format at <http://www.goddesschess.com/chessays/chessaystoc.html> (last accessed March 15, 2011). Similarly, pertinent writings by M. C. Romeo may be found at the same site as well as <http://chess-bookcase.blogspot.com/2010/10/mc-romeo.html> (last accessed March 15, 2011). According to Francés, Vinyoles, Fenollar, and Castellví formed an important socio-literary group that bridged classes during the literarily important 15<sup>th</sup> century in Catalunya: "En realitat, el grup Fenollar-Castellví-Vinyoles podria ser considerat com un cercle sòcio-literari pont entre el grup aristocràtic i el grup burgés pròpiament dit" (27). General information and context may be gleaned in Martín de Riquer, *Historia de la literatura catalana*, Barcelona: Ariel, 1964–1966 and *Literatura catalana antiga*, (Barcelona: Editorial Barcino, 1961) where Volume III was edited by Joaquim Molas (no. 193 in the book series) and Volume IV by Josep Romeu (no. 194).

<sup>35</sup> All translations are my own, though I would here like to acknowledge the help of Carmen Sanchez in the work of translating Catalan.

<sup>36</sup> Murray includes a brief synopsis of the game and mentions that the allegorical values assigned to the pieces recall the *Eschéz d'Amours* (*A History of Chess*, 781 and 781, note 6).

Venus

Vergonya [Shame] 	Desdenys [Disdain] 	Dolços esguarts [Sweet gazing] 	Belea [Beauty] 	Honor [Honor] 	Dolços esguarts [Sweet gazing] 	Desdenys [Disdain] 	Vergonya [Shame] 
Cortesies [Courtesy] 	Cortesies [Courtesy] 	Cortesies [Courtesy] 	Cortesies [Courtesy] 	Cortesies [Courtesy] 	Cortesies [Courtesy] 	Cortesies [Courtesy] 	Cortesies [Courtesy] 
Serveys [Service] 	Serveys [Service] 	Serveys [Service] 	Serveys [Service] 	Serveys [Service] 	Serveys [Service] 	Serveys [Service] 	Serveys [Service] 
Desigs [Desire] 	Laors [Praise] 	Pensaments [Thoughts] 	Voluntat [Willingness] 	Raho [Reason] 	Pensaments [Thoughts] 	Laors [Praise] 	Desigs [Desire] 

Març [Mars]

Figure 3: The intial set-up of the board in the *Scachs d’amor*

As in the *Liber* and the *Eschéz d’amours*, each piece assumes an allegorical social value, but this chess allegory retains a strict symmetry that is absent in the earlier allegories. Whereas the pawns represented different peasants and

tradesmen in Jacobus or various moral values in the *Eschéz*, here all pawns represent the same value on each side, as do both rooks, both knights, etc. Figure 3 shows the initial set-up of the game. On Mars' side, Reason reigns supreme as king—perhaps this lover has learned the lesson of the *Eschéz d'Amours*?—but his queen, the most mobile and powerful piece here represents Willingness, hinting that the man retains an aggressive posture. His rooks represent Desire and, given that their power is second only to that of the queen, it would seem that the man's desire for the woman is strong. Thoughtfulness and Praise, the knights and bishops, respectively, play important intermediary positions between the weakest but most numerous pieces—the pawns of Service—and the more powerful pieces.

The hierarchization of the Lady's pieces and thus gendered social values remain quite traditional and prescriptive vis-à-vis woman's station in medieval society. Readers of medieval love literature intuit the difficulty of the woman's situation: her king is Honor, whom she must protect at all costs. Her queen of Beauty is a nod to the powerful forces of gazing that would entrap suitors as seen to be so potent in the *Eschéz d'Amours*. Second only in power to her queen are her rooks of Shame, for they protect her from any rash action that might endanger her king. Her bishops of Sweet Gazing help her to engage her opponents while her knights of Disdain help repel unwanted advances. Finally, her pawns of Courtesy form her front line of defense, helping her show a decorous exterior to all suitors.

Mars moves first, followed by Venus, and then Mercury distills from each exchange of moves a particular axiom pertaining to loving. Mars makes 21 moves, and Venus 20. Mercury comments twenty times throughout the poem, thus with the three introductory stanzas, we have 64 stanzas in all. After each exchange, Mercury, the arbiter, comments on three levels of the game: the chess player, the import of the game and move for amorous discourse, and the rules of the game. This is a dynamic similar to what we saw in the *Eschéz d'Amours* with two very important differences: first, readers of the *Eschéz* must consult Evrart's parallel commentary to make any sense of the allegory; and second, in the *Scachs*, the chess game makes sense as chess.

Chess and allegory come together perfectly here, and the game's moves, both literal and allegorical. Opening with what today is called the "Scandinavian Defense," the poet's allegorical narrative follows these moves seamlessly:

Lo camp partit	y tota la gent presta,
lo gran guerrer,	ab la nsenya vermella,
mogué tantost	a tota se requesta,
prenent <i>Amor</i>	per nom en sa querela;
e trameté	ves lo camp de la bella
lo pus valent	<i>Peó</i> de la conquesta:
lo qual tirà	dos passos devers ella,

Movent aquest            lo Rey, *Rahó* descobre,  
e lo camí            de *Voluntat* se obre. (28–36, original emphasis)

[The camps divided and all people readied,  
the great warrior, wearing the vermillon crest,  
moves as soon as requested to do so,  
taking Love's part in the cause;  
and he sends forth towards the beautiful woman's camp  
the most worthy Pawn in the conquest:  
moving the King's pawn two squares towards her,  
he discovers (or uncovers) Reason,  
and opens the path of Willingness.]

There are no strained moves, no smoke or mirrors to distract the suitor into playing a bad game in order for the allegory to make sense. Mars' king's pawn—the most valiant of his pawns, we are told—advances, uncovering Reason, i.e., the reasonableness of his quest, and opening the path of Willingness, which, as we shall see plays a most important role in the game. The lady responds by advancing her queen's pawn, uncovering Beauty but threatening the man's pawn:

Lo seu Peo, cortes, ab gran temprança,  
Avant passa, perque Bellea obre,  
En joch d'amor, la primera parança.        (vv. 41–43)

[Her own Pawn, courtesy, with much moderation,  
Moves ahead, because Beauty opens,  
In the chess of love, the first trap.]

The suitor then takes her pawn with his own, and the Lady responds decisively in kind: she sends out her queen of Beauty who smites the over-aggressive pawn.

The rest of the allegory can be recounted easily as the progressive courting and seduction of a lady who guards her honor above all at the behest of a man who acts according to reason. Once the lady has taken the pawn with her queen, the suitor counters with his knight of Praise and the Lady takes a less aggressive posture by pulling back her queen of Beauty. The queen's retreat to its original square is a conservative move, and hints at the more passive game that Venus will play against Mars. Throughout the rest of the match, Mars advances steadily forward by doing service repeatedly over the course of the match. The lady responds sometimes with pawns of Courtesy, sometimes with her knights of Disdain, thus adequately conveying the to-and-fro in traditional courtship where the lady might test the will and patience of her suitor. It is, in fact, when Mars' queen of Willingness threatens Venus' rook of Shame that the



battle heats up considerably: Disdain advances, simultaneously allowing Beauty to safeguard Shame while blocking a potential attack to Honor, the king; Mars then utilizes Praise in three successive moves in an effort to placate Venus and bolster Will's attack—in other words, to use a word from the *Eschéz*, in order to *conforter* Will's advance. Service is done again, but Disdain, sensing perhaps that things are going badly, moves forward and forks Will and Thoughts. Will the suitor have to sacrifice one? Yes, but when Thoughts moves forward, he checks Honor, and despite Disdain's capture of Thoughts, Venus' position has become seriously weakened, and she cannot recover.

As in the *Eschéz*, the final mating in the *Scachs* invites special consideration. Thoughts and Sweet Gazing are each captured, which allows Willingness to move forward, again, bolstered by Desire, to capture Disdain. Honor must move one square to its left, which allows Willingness to move forward and mate Honor. Not only does the penultimate move manage to isolate her second rook of Shame on the other side of the king of Honor, thus rendering it helpless to lend aid and perhaps save her reputation, the mate takes place in the square where the Lady's queen began. As I argue above when reading *Eschéz d'Amours*, the chess square is suggestive of a room or even a bed: the sexual act here has particular political and dynastic overtones—it takes place in the former queen's own bed.

Throughout the game, Mercury comments on the game, providing a list of rules (*leys*) for understanding the chess of love. His comments differ from those made by Evrart on the *Eschéz d'Amours*, however, in both content and form. In content, Mercury's running commentary does not add anything to the play and they often comment on rules and features of the game that have nothing to do with the immediately preceding moves. In other words, they are not necessary *in stricto sensu* to understand the game at hand, either on the allegorical or literal level of the poem. However, in form, Mercury's stanzas are necessary to the poem's over-arching poetic scheme: without them, we would be left without the 64 stanzas needed to reflect the 64-square chessboard. This is an important point: the *Scachs* commentary, contrary to Evrart's glossing of the *Eschéz*, are part and parcel of the poetic text itself. Mercury's abstractions, nevertheless, confirm how pieces move in the new game, that is, not just in this game, but in all chess games. In other words, allegory and chess are no longer at odds or have to be forced together as a square peg into a round hole. Arbitrary moves and rule breaking are no longer needed to make the poem's heuristic point known to all readers. In the *Scachs*, chess and allegory are woven seamlessly together to create a narrative that makes for solid—if not inspired—chess and a cogent allegory. From this point on and as the new game replaced the older *assizes* for good, chess allegorists could use the commonly

agreed upon rules to compose moves, sequences, and games in order to articulate their personal, social, or political messages.

In plotting the passage from the “Explanation of Chatrang” to the *Scachs d’amor*, we have come completely full circle in how such allegories are understood. The first chess allegories make sense because they relate to exterior manifestations of human behavior and it is through an understanding of the outside world that readers make sense of the world on the board. From there, poets, in the midst of great experimentation in chess rules, attempt to move forward in two important ways: for one, they attempt to make their allegories more dynamic; for another, they attempt to relate chess to less observable human behavior and towards the psychological realms of love and courtship. However, the *Eschéz d’Amours* and texts like it only make sense through poetic, paratextual or extratextual commentary. With the dawn of the common rules of chess in the late fifteenth century, a number of important developments take place with a significant result. Readers no longer need to refer to outside commentaries or even the outside world to understand that occurs in allegories like the *Scachs d’amor* for everything they need is contained in the poem: rules, moves, allegorical values, and heuristic aim. In other words, common knowledge of human affairs off the board—of war or the body politic—is no longer necessary for understanding chess; rather, it is the common experience of chess that becomes the vehicle for understanding human affairs. Instead of showing how chess is like love, we are shown how love is like chess. Poets of early chess allegories use the game almost as a pretext for their overt political message, and poets in the formative years can rely on some common experience of the game, but as the rules of the medieval game varied widely, the poet had to supplement with extensive glossing and poetic commentary. When the fifteenth-century reform establishes a common understanding among all chess players, chess allegory finally completes its trajectory towards universal comprehensibility and becomes sensible on its own terms.

## Chapter 10

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### The Limits of Allegory in Jacobus de Cessolis' *De ludo scaccorum*

Jacobus de Cessolis' *De moribus hominum et de officiis nobilium super ludo scaccorum* was one of the most popular books of the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> At first glance, the *Liber de ludo scaccorum*, as it was more commonly known, is a handbook in four parts about the game of chess. But on closer scrutiny, chess is mainly a pretext for the author's reflections about morality and good government. After a brief account of its origins, the author describes the chess pieces and their movement. He does not however provide readers with strategies; nor does he describe a game in play. Rather, the *Liber de ludo scaccorum* emphasizes the duties and responsibilities of the different social orders and, as Jenny Adams writes in her recent book, it makes the case for the interdependence of social classes in creating civic order, rather than focusing exclusively on the role and the authority of the king, as is the case instead in many of the "mirror of princes" of the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> The different pawns, for example, represent the different ranks of commoners, including peasants, craftsmen, and merchants. All of them are beholden to the nobility and, yet, in Jacobus' book they too enjoy the rights of and contribute to the harmonious civic order. The notion that civic order entailed a thick interdependence among classes was a major innovation of 13<sup>th</sup>-century Italy. After briefly describing the work therefore, we shall consider several themes and features of Jacobus'

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<sup>1</sup> See H. J. R. Murray's classic work, *A History of Chess* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 537.

<sup>2</sup> Jenny Adams, *Power Play. The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Middle Ages*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 15–56. See also in this volume Amandine Mussou's article for more about the "mirror of princes" and articles by Daniel E. O'Sullivan and Kristin Juel for the static nature of Jacobus's chess allegory.

extended allegory. The *Liber de ludo scaccorum* has come down to us in hundreds of manuscripts and in many printed editions, including Caxton's 1474 edition. Recent scholarship has done much to raise the work's critical *fortuna* in modern times. Much of it focuses on the work's meaning in the context of medieval moral and political philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Although the present study relies on existing philological scholarship and critical interpretations, it aims to make sense of the ambiguities in the tract but also of the profound intuitions of its author.<sup>4</sup> The *Liber de ludo scaccorum* is a moral and political philosophical treatise and a handbook on chess. It is an unusual work that transcends one particular literary genre or kind of inquiry.

Jacobus de Cessolis was a Dominican friar who was likely born in the town of Cessola near Asti in northwestern Italy. According to Fr. Thomas Kaeppli and other scholars he is identified in documents from 1317–1322 belonging to a Genoese notary.<sup>5</sup> Jacobus was a member of the religious community of San Domenico in Genoa where he was renowned for his sermons. At the monastery of San Domenico, he had a ready audience of brothers and parishioners, as well as an ample library of books to draw from for his own writing. The exact dating of the *Liber* is unknown, but scholars agree that it is datable to the last quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> C.

In the very first paragraph of the text he states the reasons for the work:

Persuaded by the prayers of my brothers, by secular students and other honorable people who have heard my sermons, I, Brother Jacob de Cessolis, of the Dominican

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<sup>3</sup> How could there not be great interest in the *De ludo scaccorum* given the worldwide passion for the game of chess? Among the more recent scholarship, besides Adams' book just mentioned, figure the following: Raymond D. Di Lorenzo, "The Collection Form and the Art of Memory in the *Libellus super ludo schachorum* of Jacobus De Cessolis," *Medieval Studies* 35 (1973): 205–21; Gösta Hedegård, "Jacobus de Cessolis' Sources: The Case of Valerius Maximus," *Chess and Allegory in the Middle Ages*, eds. Olle Ferm and Volker Honemann. Scripta minora, 12. Stockholm: Runica et Mediaevalia, 2005; Jean-Michel Mehl, "Jeu d'échecs et éducation au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Recherches sur le "Liber de moribus" de Jacques de Cessoles," Ph.D. diss., Université de Strasbourg, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> This essay was inspired by my experience as an Everett Helm Visiting Fellow at the Lilly Library (Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana) during the summer of 2002. While there, I came across an early manuscript of the *De ludo scaccorum*. Although known to the librarians and cataloguers, few scholars had actually studied the codex, MS. Ricketts 194. My scholarship, more generally speaking, deals with the interrelation between texts and documents, that is, between literary works and the manuscripts that contain them from the point of view of material philology. Far from being an expert or scholar of chess therefore, I am intrigued by the author's stated objectives in the work and how the text might have been interpreted in early 14<sup>th</sup> C Italy. I wish to thank Breon Mitchell, Director of the Lilly, for the opportunity to study the collection and Joel Silver, Librarian and Curator, for his scholarly assistance throughout my stay. I also wish to thank my friend and colleague, H. Wayne Storey for his generous hospitality while in Bloomington.

<sup>5</sup> See Thomas Kaeppli, "Pour la biographie de Jacques de Cessole," *Archivum fratrum praedicatorum* 30 (1960): 149–62, and for the documents themselves, 158–62.

Order, have written this book on the game of chess. I have done it to improve our character and to teach something about labors. I thus call it a book of manners and of the offices of the nobility. I will first delineate the parts of the book and the chapters of each part so the reader can easily find what is desired.<sup>6</sup>

Readers will immediately pick up on several of the author's claims and the testimonial tone of the first sentence. We learn that Brother Jacobus originally presented his text as a series of sermons to the religious and lay community of San Domenico. The heterogeneous audience is certainly believable given the actual role of religious institutions in educating lay people. As Adams rightly underscores, Genoa already had a secular social and political order that also witnessed struggles between Guelphs and Ghibellines, similar in this regard to other established medieval communes.<sup>7</sup> During the second-half of the 13<sup>th</sup> C, Genoa was thriving financially thanks to a brisk shipping trade and its longstanding role as a great maritime nation. Politically, Genoa reflected the tension not so much as between Church and Empire as between nobleman (mostly wealthy traders) and the *popolo* or commoners. As a local Church leader, Jacobus would have been deeply concerned about the fate of Genoa and the surrounding region.

From the standpoint of rhetoric, his mention of the intended audience also reinforces his appeal to readers outside the Dominican community. Like the game of chess he describes, Jacobus engages his readership at the beginning of the work as if he were entering ongoing public debates *in medias res*. Theories of authorship have emphasized the paternalistic and authoritative stance of writers toward their public. Yet his opening declaration highlights his role as a mediator, in contrast with the more common view of the author as *auctoritas*. As a highly skilled orator he acknowledges his Dominican brothers, secular students, and other honorable men of the community because without them his text would fall on deaf ears. He is as dependent on his audience as his audience is on him. The contractual nature of writing for an intended audience corresponds to his vision about the interrelation of the social roles represented by the chess pieces. In the same sentence, Jacobus asserts his authorship and he

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<sup>6</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*. H. L. Williams, ed. and trans. (New York: Italica Press, 2008), 3. Throughout this essay, I use Williams' translation of Jacobus' text. According to the bibliographic essay, the translation is based on Gerhard Schmidt's edition, *Das Schachzabelbuch des Jacobus de Cessolis*, O.P. Texte des späten Mittelalters, 13 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1961) and also on information about classical sources in the footnotes to Ferdinand Vetter's edition, *Das Schachzabelbuch Kunrats von Ammenhausen*. Bibliothek alterer Schriftwerke der deutschen Schweiz., 1. Serie. (Frauenfeld: Huber, 1892).

<sup>7</sup> Jenny Adams gives a brief overview of the political conjuncture in Genoa. Reflecting the broader political struggle between Church and Empire, Adams writes that Jacobus downplays the clergy's presence on the chessboard (i.e. bishops are "elders" or magistrates), signifying the decreased power of the clergy in temporal affairs (*Power Play*, 23–26 [see note 2]).

will restate it in the colophon. This has the effect of establishing the author as the creator of the text, but also as the scribe, underscoring the work's textual reliability and authenticity.<sup>8</sup>

Similar to most medieval books, the *incipit* frequently functions as the title. In claiming to improve people's character Jacobus identifies his work as being about morals. He also writes that it is a book about labors, that is, the relationship between the different social classes and about the duties of the nobility. It would appear in fact that noblemen are Jacobus' primary audience. The temptation to read the *Liber de ludo scaccorum* as a critique of the local political scene is supported by the author's explicit acknowledgment of his audience and by the illocutionary force of his opening paragraph. As Adams and other scholars have pointed out, under the rule of Guglielmo Boccanegra from the mid-13<sup>th</sup> to the early 14<sup>th</sup> century Genoa experienced an increase in the political involvement of the different mercantile and guild groups.<sup>9</sup> And although there are good historical reasons that prompted the author to compose his work, the particular historical conjuncture does not explain its widespread and enduring popularity. The more than three hundred manuscript copies of the *Liber de ludo scaccorum*, editions, translations, and similar works it inspired in the following centuries suggest that the work transcends the immediate historical and political circumstances. Besides the enormous popularity of chess in the Middle Ages, the *Liber de ludo scaccorum* was appreciated because it was similar to other *specula regis* and at the same time sufficiently different from that genre.<sup>10</sup> Most importantly as scholars have pointed out, readers could readily identify with the different social ranks represented by the chess pieces.

Like other Scholastic thinkers and writers, Jacobus uses the convention of presenting the structure of his work in a prologue. We learn for example that the three chapters of Part One will answer the when, who, and why of chess. The sequence of five chapters dealing with the nobility in Part Two begins with a description of the king and queen and ends with the role of rooks, according to their placement on the chessboard from the center squares to the flanks. In

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<sup>8</sup> Manuscripts of the period have the word *transcribere*. Although the sense here is "to write" (as Williams translates) rather than "transcribe" (his oral sermons), in the late Middle Ages the word had a rich semantic value. With Humanists, such as Poggio Bracciolini and Angelo Poliziano, the term takes on the more technical meaning it has today. See Silvia Rizzo's *Il lessico filologico degli umanisti*. Sussidi eruditi, 26 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984), 171–84 for a discussion of the different valences of writing terms.

<sup>9</sup> See note 7 and also Adams' bibliography especially her reference to Steven A. Epstein's book, *Genoa and the Genoese, 958–1528* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Among the many medieval authors of *specula regis*, Adams cites, Aegidius Romanus' *De regimine principum* (ca. 1280), John of Salisbury's *Policratus* (ca. 1156), and Thomas Aquinas' *De regno ad regem Cypri* (ca. 1265) as important precedents for de Cessolis (*Power Play*, 28–33 [see note 2]).

Part Three, he devotes a short chapter to each of the orders of pawns: farmers, smiths, wool workers and scribes, merchants and traders, physicians and apothecaries, innkeepers and hosts, city officials and gatekeepers. The last chapter deals with ribalds, players, and gamblers and their peculiar role in society. Finally, Part Four describes the chessboard, the position of the pieces and their movements.

Throughout the work, Jacobus makes ample use of *sententiae* and *exempla* of positive and negative behavior. According to Jean-Michel Mehl a principal source was the *Speculum maius* of fellow Dominican Vincent of Beauvais (ca. 1190–1264).<sup>11</sup> In considering Mehl's conclusion, Gösta Hedegård, believes that Jacobus' unattributed borrowings from Vincent and his use of anecdotes from the most ancient writers in the *Speculum maius* are intended "to lend his *exempla* and quotations an air of greater authenticity" to his own work. Because they belonged to the same order it is reasonable to assume that the monastery of San Domenico in Genoa had its own copy of Vincent's work. Thus the majority of references in the *Liber de ludo scaccorum* can be traced to *Speculum maius* and especially to its sections dealing with justice, humility, and fortitude. Duly citing sources was a way of conveying authority to one's own work by acknowledging one's model and mentors. While paying homage to an intellectual tradition, Jacobus implies that he is continuing it also. Doing the opposite, that is, not naming one's sources directly could also serve similar ends, suggesting the writer's close identification with the views of his model. Jacobus' fellow Dominicans quite probably appreciated his references to one of their own brethren. Readers in any case would have been familiar with many of the *sententiae* and *exempla* that had been included in other *florilegia* and miscellanies. Besides the memorable sayings of the late ancient Roman Valerius Maximus, Jacobus seems to have also drawn extensively from the *Breviloquium de virtutibus* of John of Wales written in the 1270's.<sup>12</sup>

In Medieval Italy sentences and exemplary narratives were important to conveying informal norms and appropriate behavior in secular society.<sup>13</sup> Similar to Biblical parables and to the hagiographic stories that had a pedagogic

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Michel Mehl, "Jeu d'échecs," 69 and 115–30 (see note 3), also cited in Gösta Hedegård's article, "Jacobus de Cessolis' Sources: The Case of Valerius Maximus," *Chess and Allegory in the Middle Ages*, ed. Olle Ferm and Volker Honemann (see note 3), 99–159; here 100–01, notes 3 and 4. Hedegård provides close philological analysis of the sources of the Valerian references, not only from the *Speculum maius*, but from other sources also.

<sup>12</sup> Also about the use of *exempla* in the *Liber de ludo scaccorum*, see Mehl's essay on "L'Exemplum chez Jacques de Cessoles," *Le Moyen Age: Revue d'Histoire et de Philologie* 84 (1978): 227–46.

<sup>13</sup> See John. D. Lyons, *The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989) and Alexander Gelley, ed., *Unruly Examples. On the Rhetoric of Exemplarity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995) for interesting readings of early modern and more modern works that apply to medieval *exempla* as well.

function, *exempla* could be simple and archetypal or complex and ambiguous depending on the context of interpretation. Like proverbs, they occupy a timeless space and therefore aim to promote universal morality. More importantly perhaps than narratives deriving from religious writings, the moral tales featuring figures from ancient Greece and Rome underscored norms for civil society. The linking and sequencing of multiple *exempla* and *sententiae* is another important feature of the *Liber de ludo scaccorum* that highlights a complex of values and behavior that are not entirely unambiguous. For example, in describing the Queen's maternal and pedagogic role in Part Two, Chapter 2, Jacobus previews his chapter by insisting that she teach her children to be "virtuous, mannerly, and chaste."<sup>14</sup> There follows a series of short anecdotes and maxims. First there is a wise man's advice to a prospective husband that he should choose a woman whose mother and grandmother were both very modest, citing Sirach's advice about giving counsel to one's sons and keeping one's daughters chaste. Jacobus continues the thread about the importance of a virtuous education quoting Helinand and a Roman emperor who considers an "uneducated king but a crowned jackass."<sup>15</sup> He connects this immediately to a related theme about differences in the royal family's education according to gender, using Augustus Caesar's remark that his children must learn practical skills in the event that they become poor and must work for a living. Jacobus then reprises the theme of chastity and purity in the queen's daughters, recounting a terrifying anecdote about the widowed duchess of Lombardy, Rosmunda, and her daughters. When her territory is invaded by King Catinus of Hungary, Rosmunda offers herself in marriage to him and promises to give Catinus her lands. After consummating their marriage, the Hungarian king gives her to his soldiers who rape her repeatedly. Catinus then has her impaled from her genitals through her mouth and has her put on public display, proclaiming that "such an unchaste woman, who lost her city through lust, deserves to have had such a husband."<sup>16</sup> Her daughters, on the other hand, preserve their virginity by using a clever ruse. Threatened with rape, the daughters place some chicken meat under their clothing. As the heat from their bodies warms the meat, it gives off a disgusting odor and repulses their attackers, who can only complain: "Ugh, how the Lombard girls smell!"<sup>17</sup>

The intertextual complexity of the above sequence of *exempla* can be interpreted differently from the meaning of the individual *exempla*. As with most everything else, the whole is often greater than the sum of the parts. Jacobus declares the importance of literacy for princes and kings at the beginning of the

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<sup>14</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 22 (see note 6).

<sup>15</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 22 (see note 6).

<sup>16</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 23 (see note 6).

<sup>17</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 23 (see note 6).



chapter and makes no mention of princesses, even though this chapter is ostensibly about the queen's female offspring as well. He then underscores Augustus Caesar's view of the gender differences in learning practical skills, sports and arms for boys and sewing and spinning for girls, emphasizing further the stereotypical differences in child rearing. And finally, the author concludes his montage with the tale about the duchess Rosmunda who is the epitome of lust in contrast to her daughters who are paragons of chastity. The meaning of each *exemplum* and sentence is clear enough. The linking of the anecdotes into a macro-story about social norms suggests however an anxiety about reading and education, that these are formative activities best left to men perhaps. Moreover, if Jacobus' text is an allegory about civic order and about the queen's morality, he has chosen a negative *exemplum* that does not confirm the rule.<sup>18</sup> How is it that Rosmunda raised such chaste and pure girls when she herself was morally corrupt, when previously, Jacobus (quoting a wise philosopher) argues for the importance of having morally suitable ancestors as good role models?

At the same time, the *exempla* in the section just discussed can be interpreted as parody also. Although this is probably not the author's stated intention because such a reading would undermine the ethical message, several of the *exempla*, such as the two just cited, lend themselves to competing interpretations. The simpler and purer the figurative elements are in a story, the easier it is to distort them into their opposite, whether it be tragedy into comedy, good into evil. In Augustus Caesar's advice about education, it is not likely that his children would need practical skills in order to find gainful employment in the event they would become destitute. The notion of social mobility in the ancient world is the stuff of fairy tales and contemporary rags-to-riches stories and it does not fit with what we know today about a Roman patricians' sense of self and social status, let alone with that of an emperor. This is more likely an anachronistic interpretation on the author's part whose aim is to encourage an ethical connection between the most powerful secular leaders and the nobles in Jacobus' audience and their ancient precursors. We could interpret the story about the duchess Rosmunda and her daughters moreover as verging on comedy, were it not for the horrific details of Rosmunda's brutal murder. The author's remark that one of the daughters became queen of France and the other queen of Germany sounds more like a jibe against the French and the Germans (the *loci* of imperial politics) than an edifying morality tale. Whether it was meant to be comic or not, the author's juxtaposition of the contrasting fates

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<sup>18</sup> In her interpretation of the story of Rosmunda, Adams focuses on the importance of shame and the threat of exposure as applying to the queen as it does to the *populares* (*Power Play*, 40 [see note 2]).

of mother and daughters underscores the idea that acorns sometimes do fall far from the tree.

To understand chess as social allegory, we must consider several other exemplary stories and their features. In Part One, Jacobus tells us that the philosopher Xerxes invented the game of chess during the reign of the Babylonian king, Evilmerodach in order to correct the king of his cruel and abusive nature. Knowing that anyone who criticizes the king faces death, Xerxes takes an indirect approach to reforming him. By teaching the game to noblemen at court he provokes the king's curiosity. When Evilmerodach does consent to be Xerxes' pupil, he must also submit to the teachers' rules and discipline, which includes exhorting him to rule with justice and not by violence. Another reason, Jacobus informs us for the invention of chess, is that it keeps the king from becoming idle. He will make a similar point in the conclusion of the *Liber* explicitly mentioning noblemen.

Chess challenges the intellect and it is different from other commonplace games of chance, such as dice. No doubt, the author has his Dominican brothers in mind and he wishes to discourage *accidia* by encouraging them to engage in constructive leisure activities. Idleness, as Jacobus suggests, leads to depression and sin. Chess is the perfect antidote. Another reason for the game's invention is that it feeds human desire for novelty and also for knowledge. The emotional reason is perhaps the most interesting of all. Jacobus informs us in the conclusion to the first part that:

He (Xerxes) invented a game filled with various unlimited metaphors and parables. Because of the countless number of ways to play, because of the various meanings and metaphors, and because of the ingeniousness of the battles, the game has become famous.<sup>19</sup>

The fiction about the game's origins deftly couples the intellectual pastime with a constructive allegory about society; it dispenses with an erudite historical account and, instead, uses an *exemplum* to frame meaning in the work, while it also foreshadows the author's reliance on this narrative genre; and, finally, the historical fiction underscores the role of clerical and lay intellectuals, such as Xerxes, from antiquity to the Middle Ages, in developing civic order. The Dominican friar Jacobus has a lot in common with Xerxes: both wish to teach their respective interlocutors by entertaining them, but are at a disadvantage (Xerxes with the king and Jacobus with respect to the secular authorities he is writing for). As Raymond D. Di Lorenzo writes, the fictional account of Xerxes and Evilmerodach is meant "to pose a theoretical problem that was widely discussed in medieval political speculations. The problem is how to correct a tyrannical king, or if he cannot be corrected, whether tyrannicide is justifiable."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 10 (see note 6).

<sup>20</sup> Di Lorenzo, "The Collection Form," 208 (see note 3).

Apart from laying the groundwork for the rest of the treatise, Jacobus' account of the game's beginnings introduces the broader theme of chess as social and political allegory. Jenny Adams argues in her book that: "The chess set imagines an ideal community as a place where the body of the king no longer stands as the lone representative of the realm."<sup>21</sup> She also states however that there is an underlying contradiction in the pairing of the narrative of Evilmerodach's patricide of Nebuchadnezzar and the creation of the chess set because the game necessarily ends in the death of the king. In Jacobus' allegory of justice therefore the king is beholden to secular justice. According to Adams, the friar's innovation in the *Liber* is to have replaced the metaphor of the body politic with the game of chess.<sup>22</sup> In traditional medieval political philosophy, each part of the human body is a symbol of the different social ranks and orders that are under the absolute control of the head (the king). For Jacobus the chessboard symbolizes a social matrix in which the head in the old body politic metaphor is also a subject in the new metaphor of the state. In doing so, Adams remarks that Jacobus' representation of power relies on psychological control as well as on physical coercion as in the body politic metaphor. Her interpretation underscores the *Liber's* importance in the history of political thought, helping to explain also why the work was so popular.

Chess as an apt allegory of the civic order is also problematic. The object of the game is ultimately to capture and to kill the king. Without him, there is no social order. The game's objective does not square with the allegory about the harmonious society unless we wish to read it as implicitly and paradoxically promoting the destruction of the king and society for that matter. The evident contradiction is a real limit of Jacobus' political philosophy and leads us to believe that he is less a systematic thinker than he is a keen observer of the relationship between social groups.

It is also true, as Adams suggests, that the *Liber de ludo scaccorum* reflects a cultural shift toward a secular politics in which the different ranks are increasingly viewed as potential agents of change.<sup>23</sup> A good example is the representation of the bishops in chess. Jacobus calls them "elders", that is, magistrates, one to represent judges of criminal cases and the other for civil cases. Drawn from the nobility, they are mediators and purveyors of justice. Arguing for greater coherence he is in favor of universal laws, explaining:

Likewise, many commands and laws seize and constrain only the poor and common folk while leaving the greater and more powerful undisturbed. Because the poor are not treated as the rich are, and because the rich do not love the laws or fear the princes' tribunal, the poor often become swindlers and

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<sup>21</sup> Adams, *Power Play*, 18 (see note 2).

<sup>22</sup> Adams, *Power Play*, 19–20 (see note 2).

<sup>23</sup> Adams, *Power Play*, 20–21 (see note 2).

betray their own masters. If a powerful man transgressed a law and suffered for it, the courts would straightaway have a precedent that would influence the community in a positive way.<sup>24</sup>

Coherence and consistency of justice are hallmarks of democratic societies, but Jacobus is not arguing necessarily for greater individual autonomy or for greater political freedoms in a modern sense. As a Dominican friar, he would have been well versed in discussions about free will. And he is aware of the important political and historical changes taking place in Genoa in his lifetime. But his is still essentially a teleological universe, like for Dante and other late medieval writers and thinkers. For all of “the countless number of ways to play, because of the various meanings and metaphors” that makes chess intriguing, the chessboard is nonetheless a circumscribed space with prescribed roles. The apparently infinite number of moves on the chessboard is all contained within a universe at whose head sits a divine being. Jacobus’ description of the chess set and game is overall prescriptive and static. For all of its rules chess is a dynamic game however, and each move is an instance of strategic interaction that prompts an expected or unexpected move from your opponent and so on. Within the allegory then, one can imagine that a moralized game theory of sorts is being played out on the board during each game in which, for example, a pawn’s movement to a given square at a particular point in the game, could theoretically represent a given value or concept, be it moral or political. The “countless number of ways to play” and “the various meanings and metaphors” of the game that Jacobus credits Xerxes with having invented posits a teleological universe of infinite possibilities. As an allegory therefore, Jacobus promotes creativity and autonomy on the one hand, but there are strings attached, most notably the ultimately catastrophic nature of the game (the destruction of one of the kings on the board) and the subjectivity of interpretation.<sup>25</sup> The allegory only works in fact as a moral or even a political philosophy if you can actually interpret the move or play at hand. The more boundless are the possibilities of moves and strategies, the more challenging it is to attribute a definitive meaning.

Jacobus’ treatment of pawns or commoners in Part Three is another strand of his allegory of social order and justice. In describing the role of the farmer (the first pawn in front of the rook on the king’s right), he writes that:

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<sup>24</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 28 (see note 6).

<sup>25</sup> The real limit of the allegory is the fact that Jacobus does not describe a game in action. Accordingly, the game of chess either leads to catastrophe, in which the king is defeated, symbolizing the destruction of the civic order; or the king defeats his opponent, thereby causing disorder in the opponent’s realm.

Although the wisdom of the nobility may be a great thing, it will not of itself bring in any profit. Only when the nobility share with the commoners will they have any profit. Their lives rest in the hands of the workers.<sup>26</sup>

With one exception each order of commoners epitomizes virtues that correspond to the nature of their productive role in society. Fear of God, loyalty, and industriousness are a few of the farmer's characteristics, for example; whereas scribes (not just copyists, but the lawyers and bureaucrats who depended on the *ars dictaminis* for a living) must be well read and educated, honest in their work, and pure in friendships. Jacobus adds that purity in friendship should be a characteristic of all craftspeople and citizens, and draws his wisdom from Cicero, Ovid, and Peter Alfonsus. He also links the theme of purity in friendship theme with the need for scribes and others to be chaste, adopting anecdotes from Valerius Maximus, Plato, and Helinand about Demosthenes. In singling out this order of pawns, Jacobus is probably criticizing the sexual practices among "free-thinking" urban intellectuals. Whatever his reservations about them, Jacobus believes that "the scribes should advise and prevail upon everyone."<sup>27</sup>

Besides the farmer (first pawn) and scribe we have briefly considered, the other commoners/pawns are (moving from the king's right to his left): the smith (the second pawn), the clothier (and scribe, third pawn), the merchant (fourth pawn), the physician (fifth pawn), the innkeeper (sixth pawn), the city gate-keeper (the seventh) and, most interesting of all, the gambler (the eighth pawn also symbolizing the critic, spendthrift, and courier). It is worth citing Jacobus' initial description of this last commoner in Book Three because of its implications for his entire political and moral philosophy:

The eighth pawn on the chessboard is set in front of the rook on the king's left. He is thus in front of a vicar, elder, or deputy. This pawn represents the gambler, critic, spendthrift, and courier. It is proper for deputies and vicars to have men in the cities and country who are on the lookout for antagonism towards the king. Deputies also have couriers to carry royal letters and messages. Critics are needed to report on matters that will instigate shame and scandal among the vicars and the prince's deputies. And gamblers, when they are penniless, will carry messages posthaste throughout the country.<sup>28</sup>

Besides these lowlives we learn that Jacobus' social metaphor of the pawn also includes panderers, charlatans, and ruffians, essentially those who "are in the shadow of prostitutes and other immoral people" and who ultimately turn into "robbers, thieves, arsonists, murderers, and betrayers"<sup>29</sup> when their money

<sup>26</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 57 (see note 6).

<sup>27</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 68 (see note 6).

<sup>28</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 94 (see note 6).

<sup>29</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 95 (see note 6).

runs out. What are we to make of these dregs in Jacobus' otherwise virtuous society? The anthropomorphic chess piece holds three dice in his left hand underscoring gamblers as players of dice although we know that chess was also used for gambling at the time. As Jenny Adams notes, the gamblers are on the other side of the board, as far away as possible from the farmers (who are the foundations of community) and they represent vice in general.<sup>30</sup> For Jacobus using chess to gamble undermines the contractual system of working for a common profit, replacing it with personal gain.<sup>31</sup> So while condemning gambling (and vice) in general, he also disassociates chess from dice playing. Throughout her study Adams is concerned primarily with showing how the Dominican friar's allegory of chess breaks with the traditional body politic metaphor of medieval political philosophy. But she also notes how Jacobus himself is aware of the limits of his allegory. In describing the other chess pieces, he frequently uses negative *exempla* or anecdotes about vice punished, but this is altogether different from ascribing a negative value or *ethos* onto any of the pieces. The best Jacobus can hope for in his description of the ribalds is that they can be useful as messengers and letter carriers, that is if they can stay sober long enough and keep out of trouble.

Even if we accept the idea that Jacobus wishes primarily to separate chess from other gambling games, there is a problem with the representation of the eighth pawn because it apparently undermines his entire allegory of justice and civic order. Either Jacobus willingly compromises the coherence and logic of his allegory for the simple pragmatic reason that he wishes to condemn gambling and to separate chess from dice, as if this is ultimately the purpose of the *Liber de ludo scaccorum*, or he ignores this inconsistency in his allegory. Neither of these is satisfactory of course because the paradigm shift begs the question as to why he would devise such an elaborate metaphor for the relatively banal reason of reproaching chess players who gamble. Nor is it conceivable that he is unaware of the inconsistency, if indeed this is a rift or fault in his schema.

The problem perhaps is not so much with the logic of the allegory itself but rather in his conception of social roles and in how each contributes to or detracts from the civic order. What seems like a logical fault therefore is perhaps instead a profound intuition about definitions and divisions into classes and occupations. At the very least, Jacobus' representation of the eighth pawn raises several paradoxes that challenged political or moral philosophy of the time.

In the opening description of the eighth pawn, we read that "It is proper for deputies and vicars to have men in the cities and country who are on the lookout for antagonism towards the king", adding that "Critics are needed to

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<sup>30</sup> Adams, *Power Play*, 48 (see note 2).

<sup>31</sup> Adams, *Power Play*, 54 (see note 2).

report of matters that will instigate shame and scandal among the vicars and princes' deputies."<sup>32</sup> Down and out gamblers we are told make for good messengers. Hence, the criminal element can be put to good use, not for reasons of edification and rehabilitation of course, rather as spies and intermediaries who purvey important information to the authorities. The paradox is that criminals are necessary to the civic order. We could justifiably object that Jacobus is more of a political realist than an idealist and that although his work reflects a heightened sensibility of moral autonomy in late 13<sup>th</sup> C Italy he is not debating the concept of individual free will. Dante also represents gamblers, thieves, and murderers in the *Inferno*, but he does so in Hell, and he condemns them because these sinners freely chose to commit sin. Nowhere in the *Commedia* does the reader sense that sin and vice are socially useful, except in the inscrutable mind of God perhaps.

To continue, Jacobus describes spendthrifts as "wanton consumers" and argues that trustees should be appointed to prevent them from squandering all of their money. The fear is that the spendthrifts will fall into a downward spiral of further vice and crime. He even states that such rich men are ashamed to go begging and will resort to robbery and murder. The development of an awareness of individual autonomy contributed to understanding the promise and also the limits of individual agency. It is as if Jacobus however senses that there is a tension between individual agency and social determinism, between the subjectivity of ethics and the objective social constraints on individuals. In *Purgatorio XVI* for example, Marco Lombardo explains to Dante the pilgrim that Heaven gives us Reason with which we are free to choose to do good or to do evil.<sup>33</sup> We are responsible for our acts. Is man's fall into evil merely weakness of will? Dante the poet has Marco attribute man's decadent state to secular and clerical "misrule" and to the lack of leadership as represented in the struggle between the Papacy and the Empire. This is about as close as both Dante and Jacobus come to conceptualizing social determinism, by blaming the highest authorities for the chaos and lawlessness in society.

Like Dante also, Jacobus inveighs against the "wanton consumers" and instead promotes frugality: "There is a saying in various countries: He who consumes more than he has becomes poor and learns a lesson,"<sup>34</sup> or so he would hope. In reality, Genoa, Florence, and the other major trading communes in medieval Italy had undergone a sea change in which "consumerism" was becoming increasingly the lifestyle of urban elites. Incipient consumerism was antithetical to frugality or responsible husbanding of economic and natural

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<sup>32</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 94 (see note 6).

<sup>33</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, ed. and trans. Allen Mandelbaum. A Bantam Classic (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), 144–51.

<sup>34</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 96 (see note 6).

resources. To dissuade his audience from the dangers of prodigality, Jacobus recounts an *exemplum* about a rich man, John of Ganazath, who nearing his death regrets his irresponsible behavior. John's two daughters and son-in-laws are kind to him as long as his money lasts. But when he finally sees their affection and loyalty for what they are he devises a plan to teach them a lesson once and for all. After borrowing a huge sum of money from a trusted friend, a merchant, he invites his daughters and their husbands to dinner at his house. Excusing himself, he goes into an adjacent room and spreads the great pile of coins out on the carpet in the hope that his children will spy on him through a crack in the door. When they do, they are delighted to see that their father is still rich. After they leave, John secretly returns the gold to the merchant. The next day when the daughters ask him about the money he tells them that he will give most of it to them on the pact that they treat him well and take good care of him while he is alive. Later as he is dying, John informs his daughters that both his will and the key to the treasure chest are in the hands of Dominican friars. Of course, he tells them this only after they fulfill his request to contribute their own money to charity. After his death they discover that the chest is empty, save only for a club on which John has written his testament: "Whoever bears his neighbor's sorrows and neglects his own self, as I have done, should be slain with this club."<sup>35</sup> It might be that the moral of the tale is that a trusted friend is more loyal than one's own family members and that a contractual relationship between business partners or merchants is stronger than family bonds.<sup>36</sup> But according to John's testament, it would seem that it is not society or the family that has failed him; rather, that John has failed himself, underscoring his own individual agency in financial matters. At the same time however, John redeems himself by punishing his children, essentially swindling them upon his deathbed, even if arguably it is for a good cause. At the same time Jacobus' stern recommendation to entrust spendthrifts to judges and deputies in the conclusion of his story is a criticism of the consumer ethos that was taking hold over society. He claims that spendthrifts who are out of control should be wards of the government, possibly implying social causes for their behavior.

In the Fourth Book Jacobus describes the chessboard and the movements of the different pieces beginning with the king and ending with pawns. The board's dimensions are in direct proportion to the city of Babylon, with the sixty-four squares being equal to the total perimeter of the city's quarters.<sup>37</sup> The reason medieval chessboards have raised edges we are told is to represent the giant walls around the ancient city that blocked out light and precluded a view

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<sup>35</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 98 (see note 6).

<sup>36</sup> Adams, *Power Play*, 54 (see note 2).

<sup>37</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 99–100 (see note 6).



of the horizon. Within the walls there was the Tower of Babel which “was built to a height of 7,000 paces.”<sup>38</sup> In the first book we learn about the transformative powers of Xerxes’ game on Evilmerodach. The chessboard is based on the city of Babylon, a kind of dystopia according to his description, but it also symbolizes the promise of order in which the pieces can redeem the city. Jacobus even writes that the chessboard can “represent other kingdoms, even the whole world”<sup>39</sup> and recalls the marvelous tale of how the game’s inventor requested a reward of one grain of wheat or corn (millet in Jacobus’ account) on the first square, two on the second, four on the third and so on to the sixty-fourth power or, as he describes it, to the extent that “. . . one world could not supply the number of grains required.”<sup>40</sup> He continues, “Even if there were more worlds – which is contrary to nature – they would not supply enough grains of millet to completely fill the sixty-four squares.”<sup>41</sup> The tale’s interpretation is not immediately clear because at the moment Jacobus extends the board’s symbol beyond Babylon to embrace the entire world he also circumscribes its limits (within this world), even though there would not be enough millet to fill the squares.

In his study, Di Lorenzo writes that “Perhaps much of what is offhandedly called allegorical in the *Libellus* is actually mnemonical,”<sup>42</sup> citing in particular the fourth part of the work dealing with the movements of the chessmen. Mnemonics of course do not hinder an allegorical interpretation of Jacobus’ text. If anything, the allegory of chess is reinforced by mnemonics because the pieces, the board, the prescribed movements, and moves themselves become mental structures mapped onto the brain. At the same time, the allegory arguably facilitates remembering the pragmatics of the game itself.

Just as the fiction of the game’s origins sets the groundwork for interpreting the work, the conclusion encourages retrospective reflection. After summarizing the contents of the *Liber de ludo scaccorum*, Jacobus states that he has written the work for nobles and also for “other men, according to their rank, (who) would likewise benefit from understanding the subtleties of the game. They would behave more as they should.”<sup>43</sup> Jacobus’ concept of a just society rests on the wisdom of the nobles, a class that will continue to exist for centuries, but the noblemen must make room for the merchants and other urban elites. His inclusion of “other men” in the conclusion (and not only of “other honorable men” or nobles that are mentioned in the prologue) perhaps reveals his appeal

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<sup>38</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 101 (see note 6).

<sup>39</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 102 (see note 6).

<sup>40</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 102 (see note 6).

<sup>41</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 102 (see note 6).

<sup>42</sup> Di Lorenzo, “The Collection Form,” 221 (see note 3).

<sup>43</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 121 (see note 6).

to a wider readership. The summary exemplifies the transition from oral sermon to written work. At what point did Jacobus realize that his little book was of interest to a broader public outside of the Dominican community? Was it simply an instance of an orator collecting his lectures into a volume because of the encouragement of his listeners, as he writes in the prologue? One wonders in the oral and public context of the sermons moreover if the individual books and chapters are the fruit of debate with students and his brethren or are they the teachings of a master *ex cathedra*? In reading the *Liber* one does not sense that he invites debate because of the work's mainly prescriptive contents and tone. We must assume that Jacobus' audience in Genoa originally heard the sermons in sequence, more or less as we read them in the written form. The book allows for multiple readings and also different ways of reading by comparison with the oral performances. The author's introductions in his chapters were originally listeners' aids but in the book they function as rubrics that help readers identify points in the text they wish to read or re-read.

How did the pragmatics of transcription and circulation transform Jacobus' sermons? Leaving aside the issue of authorial revisions the work circulated wide and far once it left the monastery of San Domenico. The summary and the colophon would not have been a part of the sermons obviously; rather they belong to the written form as it begins to circulate. In the colophon the author declares: "I, Jacob de Cessolis, of the Dominican Order, have written this book for the honor and entertainment of the nobility, and especially for those who know the game . . ." <sup>44</sup> This is followed by the standard formulation of giving thanks to the Lord. As paratexts, colophons are usually meant to indicate the provenance of a codex, that is, the copyist and not the author, but this particular colophon merges authorship and transcription, writing and copying, underscoring the authenticity of both text and document. By repeating his name at the end Jacobus brings closure to his discourse and hopes to guarantee the authenticity of his work. His seems less a gesture of ego than it does an expression of sincere conviction about his message and a subtle admission about the vagaries of manuscript culture.

By way of concluding, let us illustrate the above points about textual transmission and interpretation of allegory by briefly discussing an early witness of the *Liber*, Ms Ricketts 194 in the collection of the Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana (see Appendix for a manuscript description). Methodologically speaking, we cannot generalize about the textual tradition of Jacobus text in the absence of a *recensio* of the many extant sources, but since most literary studies, such as the present one, typically cite modern editions

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<sup>44</sup> Jacobus de Cessolis, *The Book of Chess*, 121 (see note 6).

and translations, it is helpful to consider how graphic features and the pragmatics of book production in even one codex, like the Ricketts manuscript, conditioned textual interpretation and reception of the work.

Among several noteworthy features of the Lilly Library's copy of the *Liber de ludo scaccorum* is its very portable dimensions (circa six inches by four inches and sixty-eight folios in length), the fact that it is written in a very legible Italian Gothic round-hand script on parchment, the discreet rubrics and colored lettering. There are also many brief marginal notes that highlight passages in the text and that signal the *exempla* and maxims that often reference the source or author. There are no illustrations in the Ricketts codex. But this is not unusual in modest level book production, and the reader can easily follow the author's descriptions of the chess pieces, the board, and the movements without them. The manuscript has the look and feel of a medieval clergyman's breviary or prayer book, about the size of a small paperback novel with a rigid cover. More unusual in this kind of a book is that it has a thorough index of themes, copied out by the scribe of the main text. The unsigned note in the dossier accompanying the manuscript indicates that it was probably written no later than 1305 or 1310, a decade or two after the author supposedly wrote the work. The Ricketts' version of the *Liber* seems to be reliable, that is, with relatively few obvious errors, as if the scribe has carefully made his copy from an authoritative model.

At first glance therefore the Ricketts' codex is an excellent example of the material format of the *Liber*. The detailed index written by the scribe indicates the themes highlighted in the margins of the text and suggests that the work was already considered a *florilegium* by the early 14<sup>th</sup> C. Readers read the work from beginning to end and they could also consult it like any other anthology or inventory. Using the index provided, the reader for example could find the references dealing with friendship, justice, humility, and any theme in the text. Indexes facilitate the study of texts and they are also interpretive tools. As literacy became more prevalent in cities throughout medieval Europe and texts circulated more widely culminating with the invention of printing, paratexts, like indexes, were an important development that contributed to a different kind of learning. Indexes are finding tools that also enable readers to make choices about what and how they wish to read and so Jacobus' allegory of good government we might say is metaphorically and literally shaped by changes in information technology.

For Jacobus, the chessboard is an allegory of civic order and for medieval thinkers and writers the book is a symbol of the teleological universe. But there are limits to the book as metaphor, unless we consider its evolution as an ongoing process that includes digital technology. The paradoxes in Jacobus' allegory are reflected in the changes taking place in the readership during his

time and the changing readership reflects the evolution of book formats. Individual and intellectually autonomous readers ultimately challenge the authoritarian and prescriptive character of Jacobus' text whenever they use the index. The Ricketts codex is an instance of the *Liber*'s circulation and, as such, already reveals the interpretive limits of the allegory because readers do not necessarily have to read his transcribed sermons in the order he gave them. Reading the *exempla* out of sequence alone does not subvert authorial meanings. But indexes and, more generally, the material features of texts frame and invite different interpretations.

The *Liber de ludo scaccorum* was a best seller because it hit the book trade when chess was all the rage in medieval Europe and because individual readers could identify with one or more of the social roles symbolized by the pieces. It was in their minds a book about *them*. One wonders however if another reason for the work's popularity and the appeal of Jacobus' vision of civic order lay precisely in what he does not describe, a game in action. The desire and the potential for social mobility among readers, that is, a desire for change symbolized by the movement of the pieces across the board, was a more exciting prospect than the static game and roles described by Jacobus. In this sense, the *Liber* was a remarkable success as much for what was in the text and as it was for what was not.

## Appendix: Codicological Analysis of Ms. Ricketts 194

**MS. RICKETTS 194** (Lilly Library, Bloomington, IA)

s. XIV in.

*Jacobus De Cessolis*, De moribus hominum et de officiis nobilium super ludo scaccorum.

1. cc. 1r–63v: “Prologus super librum de ludo scaccorum/Multorum fratrum ordinis nostri . . . “Huic aut libellum ad honorem et solatium/nobilium et maxime ludum scientium. ego frater Jacobus de ce/sulis ordinis predicatorum composui . . . Explicit opus.deo gratias.”
2. cc. 63v–68r: “Tabula super ludo scaccorum . . . vitium gule fugiendum propter multa”

Written in Italy at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> C and “probably not later than 1305 or 1310”, according to the anonymous note in the dossier accompanying the codex.

Parchment and paper, ff. II (paper flyleaves) + 68 (parchment, modern numbering in pencil in the upper right hand corner) + II (paper flyleaves). 150mm x 105mm. 24 ruled lines in light brown ink and 23 written lines per side of folio. Single column text. 105mm x 75mm writing frame.

VI<sup>4</sup>, IV, VI. Catchwords: horizontal, middle of bottom margin at the end of each quire. Flourished *litterae lombardae* capital initials for beginning of each book, with rubrication for book and chapter titles, red or blue decorated initials for majuscules beginning each paragraph and red paragraph markers.

On the *recto* side of the first anterior flyleaf, there is the following bibliographical note written in an 18<sup>th</sup> C hand:

*“In fin dell’epilogo di questo libro v’è il nome dell’autore, cioè fra Jacopo da Cessolis. Questo Religioso è notissimo per quest’opera della quale ve ne sono molti esemplari manoscritti una sol volta fu stampato per quanto si sà, e fu in [. . . ] l’anno 1479 in p(er)ò ved(i) Quetif ed Echard che cita questa edizione; ivi le notizie che si possono avere dell’autore, Frate dell’ordine de’ Predicatori del Convento di Roma. Il Fontanini porta due edizioni di detta opera in lingua italiana 1-in 4<sup>o</sup> Firenze 1493, presso Antonio Miscomini, la 2<sup>a</sup> in 8<sup>o</sup> Venezia, presso il Bindoni 1534. La suddetta Biblioteca Scriptoria ordinis Predicatorum di Quetif ed Echard porta altre traduzioni di essa opera cioè in Francese, Italiano, Tedesco, ma non dice se mai sieno state stampate sembra di no, ed io credo che a quelli autori mai fossero note le due edizioni italiane delle quali fa menzione il Fontanini, v(ed)i Elog(uenza) Ital(iana).”*

The text of the *Liber* and the index are entirely in the hand of one scribe in an Italian round hand Gothic script.

Binding: 18<sup>th</sup> C, 155mm x 110mm, light brown sheepskin cover over dry tooled boards, marbled paper on inside covers.

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